







*THE ODES OF KEATS*

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# THE ODES OF KEATS

*WITH NOTES AND ANALYSES*

*AND A MEMOIR*

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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‘I have loved the principle of beauty in all things.’

*Letter of Keats to Fanny Browne.*

‘No one else in English poetry, save Shakspeare, has an expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness. “I think,” he said humbly, “I shall be among the English poets after my death.” He is, he is with Shakspeare.’ MATTHEW ARNOLD.

## PREFACE

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THE Odes treated in this work include only those composed by Keats in the brief zenith of his powers and displaying the peculiar quality of his genius. Several poems which are sometimes ranked with them are, for various reasons, not included. The *Hymn to Pan* and the *Ode to Sorrow in Endymion* are not complete in themselves apart from their setting in the longer poem. The versification of the former is not in Keats's best style, nor is the language free from the affectations of his immature period. The latter is not of equal value throughout and has no true conclusion. The Hymns *To Neptune* and *To Diana* and the Ode *To Hope* are of small poetic calibre. The Ode, *Bards of Passion and of Mirth*, though good throughout, is of a different order of composition from that of the great Odes and opens no such great highways of thought as they do. The same may be said of the *Ode to Apollo*, which reminds us of the Odes of Dryden and Pope, and of the *Hymn to Apollo*, the last stanza of which, nevertheless, contains six lines of unusual power.



The *Lines on seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair* are sincere, but not great. The *Ode to Fanny* seems over-strained and the *Lines to Fanny* somewhat commonplace.

The *Fragment of an Ode to Maia* is included because of its supreme beauty and the splendour of its thoughts. It is noteworthy that, though avowedly a fragment, it is complete in itself, and no further extension of the thought is indicated.

I have made several quotations from some of the best critics of Keats, either in order to discuss their opinions, or because the criticisms seemed to me almost as beautiful as the poems themselves. These have always been acknowledged.

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# THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF JOHN KEATS

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JOHN KEATS was born at Moorfields at the house of his grandfather, a Mr. Jennings, who kept a livery stable, at the sign of the Swan and Hoop, opposite the entrance to Finsbury Circus. His father, Thomas Keats, a west-country man, was head ostler, and had married Jennings's daughter Frances, who gave birth to John on the 29th, or possibly the 31st, of October, 1795. He was the eldest of five children, the youngest of whom was a girl. Their mother was a most affectionate parent and a woman of talent and sense.

At nine years of age, John lost his father, who was killed by a fall from his horse; and at fifteen, his mother, who died of consumption. The Keats boys went to school at Enfield with the Rev. John Clarke, father of Charles Cowden Clarke. Here John studied Latin, but learned no Greek—a fact which bears upon the study of his poetry. In his earlier school days he made but little progress, but ultimately he took easily all the literature prizes. He was a boy of great personal beauty and

remarkable liveliness. Amongst his schoolfellows he was a great favourite and a leader in all their games and exercises; and his strong propensity for fighting was tempered by the natural generosity of his disposition.

When, in his fourteenth year, he turned with all the vehemence of his nature to study, his favourite books were those of ancient mythology, and especially Tooke's *Pantheon*, Lempriere's *Dictionary*, and Tindal's edition of Spence's *Polymetis*. We shall trace the influence of these works in his poetry.

It is a token of his affectionate nature that, when his mother fell ill of her last sickness, her eldest boy tenderly nursed her and, when she died, mourned for her with uncontrollable grief.

At her death, in 1810, he was bound apprentice for five years to a surgeon, a Mr. Hammond, of Edmonton. His medical studies, however, though he made good progress, were not destined to ripen into practice.

Once or twice a week he would go over to Enfield to see his friend, young Cowden Clarke, and to read poetry with him. One day Clarke read him Spenser's *Epithalamion*, and lent him a copy of the *Faerie Queene*. This to Keats was a revelation, the opening of a new and beautiful world. His imagination was fired; his heart captivated; the well-spring of poesy within him unsealed and made to flow. To the inspiration of Spenser are due his first attempts at verse.

The next year, 1814, he left Mr. Hammond without completing his apprenticeship, and went to St. Thomas' and Guy's Hospitals. He passed an examination with credit, and became a dresser at Guy's. But he did not really care for the profession. During the lectures, he writes, a troop of fairies would ride in upon a sunbeam, and he was off with them to Oberon and fairy-land.

Thenceforth he is no more to be heard of as a student of medicine.

Amongst his equals in age Keats was a favourite. He was an agreeable companion and steady in his habits; and his devotion to poetry preserved him from low tastes. Like many poets of all periods, he seems to have regarded the world in general in a revolutionary spirit, and taken delight in attacking the established order of things. His taste in poetry led him rather to seek out and dwell upon the beauties of style, the images and descriptions, in a poem, than to be impressed by the grandeur of the action or the depth of the feeling.

It was not long before he began to make the acquaintance of men of taste in poetry and art. In the early part of 1816 Cowden Clarke introduced Keats to Leigh Hunt, who was destined to exercise a considerable, though not a permanent, influence over his intellectual life. Keats indeed was for a time a follower of Leigh Hunt in diction and versification. In these Hunt sought to escape from the mechanical method of Pope, but in doing so fell into a slipshod inferiority of style; and it is this influence that we trace in *Endymion*. Keats and Hunt were a good deal together in the summer of 1816 at Hunt's house in the Vale of Health, Hampstead, and through Hunt Keats became acquainted with John Hamilton Reynolds, who became one of his most valuable friends; with Shelley, who has enshrined his memory in his *Adonais*; and with the painter Paydon, who imparted to Keats that intelligent love for ancient art which we shall note in his poetry and especially in the *Odes*.

But amongst the truest and most faithful friends of Keats, himself an ever loyal and faithful friend, were Charles Armitage Brown of Hampstead, with whom he lived for some time, and Severn the artist, who nursed

him in his last illness<sup>1</sup>. To such as these he would show his verses, and draw from their approval encouragement to write more.

In 1817, when Keats was twenty-two years old, he published his first volume of verse, containing the *Epistles*. It was little thought of, though it contained the sonnet on Chapman's Homer. But the poetically minded could observe the nascent beauties of this immature work, though the general public showed but little disposition to buy the book. In these early poems we note the love of nature, the tendency to personification and to mythology, and the beauty, colour, and imagination which belong to all Keats's poetry.

Encouraged by his friends, and feeling within himself the capacity for higher things, he set to work upon his *Endymion*, which, after a year's work, carried on at first in the Isle of Wight, Margate, and Oxford, and afterwards at Hampstead and during a stay with his invalid brother Tom at Teignmouth, he brought out in the spring of 1818. This poem contains many beautiful passages, but Keats knew that as a whole it was immature. He wrote for it, therefore a preface, justly and modestly criticizing his own work, and deprecating undue severity towards its faults; notwithstanding which, *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly Review* fell upon it with a storm of opposition and ridicule.

The supposition of some of his friends that Keats was killed by the reviewers has found splendid expression in the *Adonais* of Shelley. It is a theory which has been disproved by research. At the same time, this literary rebuff was one of a series of troubles which now began to oppress him, and which affected the body through the mind. The family disease, consumption, was in him,

<sup>1</sup> See a note on 'The Friends of Keats,' by F. T. Palgrave, in *The Athenaeum* of Jan. 31, 1897. No. 3301.

though it had not yet shown itself. His dearly-loved brother Tom was carried off by it, and the seeds began to germinate, in his own system, especially after the fatigue of a walking excursion in Scotland with his friend Brown. His small means were melting away, and still but little prospect appeared of any adequate remuneration for his literary efforts.

At this moment a new and still more powerful source of agitation came to him. From the moment of his brother's death he became the sharer of Brown's house at Hampstead, where he set to work upon his poem *Hyperion*. Shortly after this he became the victim of a passionate attachment to a young lady, Miss Fanny Brawne, whom he had met at the Dilkes'. His affection was returned, yet as it grew in intensity it deepened in hopelessness. Not that she to whom he had given his heart, little as she was able to fathom the depths of his nature, could be charged with unkindness or neglect. In spite of the dark cloud over his prospects, she remained true to him. But Keats was too high-minded to take advantage of an engagement which had so little hope of a happy conclusion. The 'Letters to Fanny Brawne,' though they display the least admirable side of his character, remain to attest his love and his sorrow. His brother George was gone to America; when most he required soothing, all the circumstances of his life combined to excite and wear him out; poetry itself, he tells us, agitated him, though he wisely strove to compose in a calm and equable spirit; love tortured his mind; poverty looked him in the face and forbade him to hope that she whom he loved should ever be his: what wonder that his enfeebled constitution was unable to bear the strain? The candle of life was burning at both ends when the vital resources needed most jealously to be conserved.



Yet he continued to write, and within a year or two<sup>o</sup> produced his most beautiful work. The period during which his powers reached their zenith was from February 1818, when he began his *Isabella*, to September 1819, when he composed the *Ode to Autumn* at Winchester. In June 1820, before he was twenty-five, Keats published his third volume of poetry, and eight months later he was no more. But he lived to bestow upon the world, in that immortal volume, poetry of such rare quality that the poet-critic, Matthew Arnold, says of him, 'He is with Shakspeare'; and Mr. Ruskin, that supreme artist in English, writes, 'I have come to that pass of admiration for him now that I dare not read him, so discontented he makes me with my own work'; while Mr. Swinburne says of his Odes, 'Greater lyrical poetry the world may have seen than any that is in these; lovelier it surely has never seen, nor ever can it possibly see<sup>1</sup>.'

He died at Rome, whither he had gone with his friend, Severn, who tended him with devoted care. His last days were soothed by the pages of Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*. Upon the stone which marks the spot of his repose in the Protestant cemetery at Rome is an inscription dictated by his own lips,

HERE LIES ONE WHOSE NAME WAS WRITTEN IN WATER.

<sup>1</sup> Art. on 'John Keats' in *Encyclopædia Brit.*, by A. C. S.



JOHN KEATS



# THE POETRY OF JOHN KEATS

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## I. GENERALLY.

• ‘Here lies one whose name was writ in water.’ Never was gloomy vaticination less warranted by the issue. For the name of John Keats is inscribed, and will for ever remain, in the hearts of all lovers of the Beautiful. Nothing could be a fitter preface to his work than the opening line of his own *Endymion* :

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

Beauty for beauty's sake, unmixed, sensuous, is the leading characteristic of Keats's poetry in its earlier stages. Later on he came to reach out after a wider, loftier beauty, the beauty of the great classic poets and of Shakspeare, which shows itself in grandeur of conception and nobility of achievement, in the play of the elemental forces of human nature, whether the interest culminates in triumph or in catastrophe. Keats's life was too early closed to allow of his fully attaining this. But his best work exhibits beauty as expressed in nature, in art, in myth, and in personal feeling, under an almost faultless perfection of form and with a felicity and fullness

of expression that leaves no craving unsatisfied. The image or thought is presented with force, clearness, and simplicity, its tone and colour are pure and rich : the style is adapted to the thought or mood of the moment ; the sense of joy and pain is keen ; there is an infinite pathos and tenderness. It must nevertheless be admitted that the sentiment is not always equally deep, nor does Keats excel in narrative, incident, or the didactic style. But on his own lines no poet has outrun him ; Shakspeare himself does but equal him.

The wonder is greatly increased by the fact that this exquisite work was all produced before his twenty-sixth year was completed, for Keats died before reaching it. His earliest poems, the volume of 1817, though they contained the germs of better things, gave no promise of the splendid yield of 1820. It may be said that we should not have been much poorer had they never seen the light. But this could not be said of his next volume, containing *Endymion*, published in 1818. Disappointing as that poem is, as a whole ; almost unintelligible, and scarcely readable, as a narrative ; mawkish, to use his own word for it, both in sentiment and execution ; disfigured by adherence to a mistaken theory of versification ; it nevertheless contains passages, such as the *Hymn to Pan* and the *Ode to Sorrows*, of a genius and beauty rarely to be found.

In reference to Keats's debt to older English poets, we have seen that it was Spenser, 'the poets' poet,' who first awoke his genius, and Cowden Clarke has told us how he went 'ramping' through the *Faerie Queene*. The poetry of Spenser did more than stir his heart and arouse imagination. Its nobility of thought gave a healthy tone to his mind ; the Spenserian stanza afforded a splendid model for his verse ; and even the diction

and vocabulary of Spenser lent him abundant material, of which he made free use. Shakspeare was to Keats as his daily bread, a necessary condition of poetic existence, rather than a school in which he learned his art. 'Thank God,' he said, 'I can read, and perhaps understand, Shakspeare to his depths.' Chaucer he had studied, though he did not borrow much from him. To Milton he perhaps owed more than to any other poet. In his *Hyperion* he imitates Milton's literary style, and this very fact led him ultimately to give up the work: 'there were too many Miltonic inversions in it,' he said. From the same quarter he learned the use of participial adjectives, and drew many unusual words and forms; and Milton's poems supplied him with suggestions for his own, or at least for scenes in them, as, for example, in the *Ode to Melancholy* and the second book of *Hyperion*. To Chapman, Browne, and Chatterton he was indebted in a minor degree.

The development of his poetic powers was gradual, but rapid. It was but two years after the publication of *Endymion* that he placed before the world the third volume, containing *Lamia*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Isabella*, *Hyperion*, and the *Odes*. In these noble poems he has laid aside the excrescences and tricks of style which injured his earlier work; there is a grandeur of tone, a sweetness of diction, a closeness and accuracy of touch, a purity of motive, a grappling with reality, beyond anything that we have seen in him before. By them his fame was established and those words of his justified, 'I think I shall be among the English poets after my death.'

There are three principal elements to be observed in Keats's work: Nature, Hellenism, and Romance.

His sympathy with Nature is not of the reflective and ethical order, drawing food for moral aspiration from the

flowers of her meadows and noors, as the bee draws their honey. He does not philosophize upon the phenomena around him. But with an intense and passionate simplicity, holding, as it were, his breath with wonder and delight, he seeks to know Nature perfectly, and to enjoy her fully, with no ulterior end or other thought than to give her complete expression. With him, no considerations of natural theology, humanity or metaphysics mingle with Nature. He loves her purely for her own sake, and paints her, not with the reason, but with the imagination. With him Nature is no mere synonym for the visible. Not sight alone, but all the senses, offer themselves to him as media for her apprehension and illustration.

When Shelley replied to one asking how Keats, with his antecedents, could have made references to Grecian story, 'Because he *was* a Greek,' he probably but half comprehended the truth of his own epigram. It was spoken, no doubt, out of his admiration for *Hyperion*; yet there is more to be said than that Keats sometimes chose Greeks for his heroes. In what then does the Greek element in Keats consist? First, in his passion for Beauty, which is of the same order, though of smaller scale, as the Greek love for τὸ καλόν. The beauty in which Keats revelled was sensuous, though imaginative. That of Greece combined with this the beauty of intellect and of character. With Aristotle Virtue is a mean between extremes. The Greek conception of the perfect citizen is the καλοκάγαθός. Keats had not learned—what ever he might afterwards have done, had he lived—to apply this principle to speculation and conduct. Secondly, in the simplicity and directness of expression of his best work, the inestimable quality of Homer and the Greek tragedians. Thirdly, in his gift for the personification of

the powers of nature; as for instance in his *Ode To Autumn*. Fourthly, in the human interest which he at times, as in *Lamia*, allows to dominate minor details. And lastly, in the delight he everywhere shows in the myths, 'the beautiful mythology of Greece,' as he calls it in the preface to *Endymion*, and which he studied chiefly in the prosy pages of Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*. The interest in the Elgin Marbles, which Haydon had awakened in him, gave a special and beautiful turn to Keats's Hellenism. To this motif we owe his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and his *Ode on Indolence*, poems of a unique and characteristic beauty.

By Romance we must understand those poems of love and adventure, often tinged with the religious spirit of mediæval days, originally written in the Romance dialect, and connected with such heroes as Arthur and Lancelot, Charlemagne and Rolando.

The Romantic element in Keats appears less in his choice of subjects than in his manner of treating them. *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Hyperion*, are all classical in story; but their treatment is Romantic. On the other hand, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Isabella*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, are Romantic in both subject and style. These three are drawn from the Middle Ages, in which Romance breathes most freely, and into which Spenser led the young poet, while Boccaccio furnished him with material fit to wear the glories of his verse. Love all-daring, all-enduring, faithful unto death; the spirit of nobility and chivalry; the strange, the weird, the adventurous; the touch of Faëry-land, of the Arabian Nights and of gramarye—all these dwell in his lines as in a palace of art and wonder with

magic casements opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas in faëry lands forlorn.



## II. THE ODES.

Nothing like the Odes of Keats is to be found in English literature of earlier date. He may be said to have created, in them, a new class of lyrical poetry. The Hymn to Pan and the 'Roundelay' of the Indian maiden, in *Endymion*, were preliminary flights in which he had tried his wings for more sustained excursions. In the Odes he is at his best, and they will live as long as English poetry is read. They are six in number, with the first stanza of a seventh unfinished. Of these, five were published in his life-time in the volume of 1820; the *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Psyche*, *To Autumn*, and the *Ode on Melancholy*. The fragmentary *Ode to Maia*, *Written on May-Day*, and the *Ode on Indolence*, are among the posthumous poems.

In these poems there is no rhetoric or rhapsody; nothing that suggests the bard or the musical accompaniment, still less the choral dance. They are composed in a reflective spirit, now pensive, now joyous, according to the theme or mood, but always self-contained and natural. The tension is sometimes great, though restrained, and the sympathy with beauty cultivated to its highest degree. They are the reflection of the poet's innermost mind.

The several elements that we have noted in his poems generally are all present in the Odes, together with another, the particular mental state of the poet himself. This last is particularly prominent in the Odes *To a Nightingale* and *On Melancholy*, and it appears in the *Ode on Indolence*. Hence Mr. Colvin classes the two former as the 'personal odes.' The Greek element shows itself most plainly in the Odes *On a Grecian Urn* and *To Psyche*, in which it is indeed the motive of the

poem ; but also, in a less degree, in the personification of the season in the *Ode To Autumn* ; in the reintroduction of an antique marble urn, with its symbolical figures, in the *Ode on Indolence* ; and in the fragment *Written on May-Day*, which suggests the *Psyche* ; while it interweaves itself with the stanzas of the *Nightingale*. The Romantic element, to which this form of poetic expression is not well suited, appears in an exquisite passage in the *Nightingale*, an ode in which we find no one of these elements wanting, Nature, Hellenism, Romance, and personal poetic mood. The *Autumn* may on the whole be called an ode of Nature, and indeed Nature in her most beautiful guise looks out at us from almost every stanza of the Odes.

Mr. A. C. Swinburne thus sums up the comparative estimate of the set<sup>1</sup> : 'Of these perhaps the two nearest to absolute perfection, to the triumphant achievement and accomplishment of the very utmost beauty possible to human words, may be that to *Autumn* and that *On a Grecian Urn* ; the most radiant, fervent, and musical is that *To a Nightingale* ; the most pictorial, and perhaps the tenderest in its ardour of passionate fancy, is that to *Psyche* ; the subtlest in sweetness of thought and feeling is that on *Melancholy*. Greater lyrical poetry the world may have seen than any that is in these ; lovelier it surely has never seen, nor ever can it possibly see. From the divine fragment of an unfinished ode *To Maia*, we can but guess that, if completed, it would have been worthy of a place beside the highest.' Taken together, they display a 'deep and cunning instinct for the absolute expression of absolute natural beauty.' 'Had Keats left us only his Odes,' writes Mr. Bridges, 'his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is.'

<sup>1</sup> *Encycl. Brit.* art. 'Keats.'

A later school of poetry, of which Lord Tennyson is the leader and chief example, owes its exquisite cultivation of form to the art of Keats. He lives on in their strains, and will live in those of writers yet unborn.

We may now turn to the examination in detail of these poems, which are given, so far as the first five are concerned, in the order in which they appear in the volume of 1820, the two posthumous ones *To Maia* and *On Indolence* closing the set.

The following is the approximate order of the composition of the *Odes*, although it cannot pretend to certainty. It may serve to suggest the way in which the poet's mind and art developed during the period from Spring to Autumn, 1819, which represents the high-water mark of his poetry :

1. *Written on May Day* . . . May 1, 1818.
2. *On Indolence* . . . . . March 19, 1819.
3. *To Psyche* . . . . . before April 15, 1819.
4. *To a Nightingale* . . . . . (April or) May 1819.
5. *On a Grecian Urn* . . . . . Spring of 1819.
6. *On Melancholy* . . . . . before September (Spring?) 1819.
7. *To Autumn* . . . . . September, 1819.

Another mode of classifying the *Odes* is according to the motif:

1. The Ode of Nature . . . . . *To Autumn.*
2. Greek Odes . . . . . { *On a Grecian Urn.*  
   *To Psyche.*  
   *To Maia.*
3. Odes of Poetic Mood . . . . . { *To a Nightingale.*  
   *On Melancholy.*
4. Composite Ode . . . . . *On Indolence.*

THE ODES OF KEATS .



## I ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

*Written May (April ?), 1819*

IN the spring of 1819 Keats was residing at Hampstead, under the hospitable roof of his friend, Charles Armitage Brown. A few months earlier, he had lost his brother Tom. A deep grief ensued, and, though there was as yet no marked failure of his own health, he was far from well. We can detect in the *Ode to a Nightingale* itself signs of that drooping of the vital powers which was the overshadowing of the wings of Death. The attacks of the Reviewers aggravated his troubles, as did also the recent departure for America of his other brother, George Keats, and his wife. And the fact that he had, but a few weeks before, fallen deeply in love with Miss Brawne and become her accepted suitor, was, under the existing circumstances of his life, a new cause of anxiety.

April is the month in which the nightingale returns from North-West Africa, and upon its reappearance in this country it seems filled with joy. It dwells in woods and groves near to water, such woods as are still found at Hampstead. Hour by hour, and day after day, the bird pours forth its flood of song, and in the night its voice is often heard more rich and striking, because of the hush of all competing sounds. This spring, a nightingale had made its nest near Brown's house in Wentworth Place. Its note was not lost upon the sensitive soul of Keats, and, perfectly satisfying as are the enchanting tones, we have their poetic counterpart in this Ode.

One morning during this period, when his mind was filled with the mingled feelings of love and sorrow, of hope and fear, of baffled ambition and high courage, of grief at his losses and forebodings for his physical powers, 'he took his chair from the breakfast table'—so writes Brown—'to the grass-plot under a plum, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quickly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale*.' Not long afterwards, while walking with his friend Haydon in the Kilburn meadows, he recited this Ode, 'in his low tremulous undertone,' and with thrilling effect. •

It was published in the July number of the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, the same year, and was at that time headed, 'Ode to *the*'—not *a*—'Nightingale.'

### ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
 But being too happy in thy happiness,—  
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
 In some melodious plot  
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

## II.

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim  
And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

## III.

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs;  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs;  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

## IV.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:



Already with thee! tender is the night,  
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
 But here there is no light  
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
 And mid-May's eldest child  
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

## VI.

Darkling I listen; and for many a time  
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
 To take into the air my quiet breath;  
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
 In such an ecstasy!  
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
 To thy high requiem become a sod.

## VII.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
 The same that oft-times hath  
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
 Of peilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

## VIII.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
 As she is fated to do, deceiving elf.  
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
 In the next valley-glades:  
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
 Fled is that music;—do I wake or sleep?

The Ode, it will be seen, consists of eight stanzas of ten lines each; eighty lines in all. The *Psyche*, composed about the same time, was written in a long irregular stanza; but in this he adopts a regular one, of five rhymes, the first two being arranged in a quatrain and the last three in a sextain, thus:

a, b, a, b, e, d, e, c, d, e.

All the lines are the ten-syllable iambic, or heroic; except the eighth in each stanza, which has three feet, or six syllables. The last line of the second stanza is an Alexandrine, or twelve-syllable line, and in it the poet cunningly expresses the sense or action of the passage, as we shall see hereafter in analyzing the stanza. The rhymes are faultless, except perhaps in the seventh and tenth lines of stanza vi, where 'sod' is rhymed with 'abroad'; which is an imperfect harmony. There is one feminine ending; that is, in the seventh and tenth lines of stanza iii.

The alliteration is skilful and almost unconscious. In stanza i the predominating sound is 's,' artfully iterated. Still more subtle is the interweaving in the first four lines of stanza ii of the sounds of 'f' and 'v'—'*vintage*,' '*delved*,' '*Flora*,' '*Provençal*'; and, in line 7, the 'b' in '*beaded bubbles winking at the brim*.' The vowels are toned with equal skill; for example, the 'e' in lines 3 and 4 of stanza iii and the 'a' in stanza v. The 'f' and 'v' occur again in stanza v, line 7: '*Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves*.' But it would be tedious to trace out every instance of this effective usage.

Two various readings out of the number that have arisen, chiefly from revision by the poet's own hand, will be noticed presently, on account of their suggestiveness.

### ANALYSIS.

*Stanza I.* The poet begins with a description of the effect produced upon him by the song of the nightingale, which he compares to the numbing influence of hemlock or the soporific power of an opiate. The hemlock is not introduced as a poison, but as a narcotic, and Keats, as a medical student, would be familiar with the effects of drugs. At the same time, we cannot but think of the immortal story of the death of Socrates, and of the creeping numbness which grew upwards from his feet towards his heart as the active properties of the cup of hemlock that he had swallowed asserted themselves. In this case, however, the effect produced in the poet's mind is a peculiarly pleasurable one:

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thy happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,

In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Sings of summer in full-throated ease.'

These opening lines do not make it perfectly clear how the numbness arises from joy in the bird's happiness, but Mr. Forman pleads that perhaps 'the tremulous thickness of utterance arising from intense emotion is . . . better rendered by the means employed . . . ' than if the thought had undergone a little more chastening.' What is the state of mind or mood here represented, that this twofold effect should be produced upon the poet by the song of the nightingale—an abstraction from the world around, accompanied by a sense of exalted and unselfish pleasure, a kind of swooning happiness, sensuous, but not divorced from reason and reflection? It must be, and we know how the circumstances of Keats's life at the time support this view, that the state out of which the bird's flood of song has summoned him is one of intense self-regard, in which the mind broods in deepest depression over its own woes, real or imagined. This was indeed the tendency of Keats's mind, and everything just now conspired to foster it. The poet, without renouncing this condition, upon which he looks as a gloomy and fatal necessity, is glad to be relieved from it, though but for a time, by the magic of the nightingale's music. That this is so is placed beyond doubt by the subsequent stanzas, in which he yearns to be able to forget

'The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan.'

Or again : • • •

'Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

• To tell me back from thee to my sole self!'

Other hints of his mental state may be found in the allusion to the 'dull brain' in stanza iv, line 4, and stanza vi, in which he tells us how he has wooed Death, 'easeful Death'; in the sad notes, suggested rather than struck, in stanza vii, where he speaks of the bird as not born for death, in implied contrast to his own deathful state; where he speaks of the sad and homesick heart of Ruth cheered in fancy by the same song, thus suggesting the sorrowful feelings of the present listener; and where too, in

a somewhat obscure passage, but one of which the spirit is unmistakable, he pictures the bird-music as

‘The same that oft-times hath  
Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.’

This then is the spirit of the Ode. The poet represents himself as holden for the time by the enchantment of the nightingale’s singing. It seems to him that he is listening to the singing of a Dryad, or wood-nymph, and her song is a song of the summer.

Here a question of some interest arises. Was the bird singing at the time of the actual composition of the Ode?

We have seen that this took place after breakfast, and occupied some two or three hours; therefore the Ode was not actually what it purports to be, a nocturnal experience or outpouring, but the result either of memory or of imagination, probably the latter. And as the immediate effect of the singing would be to absorb the mind into the pleasure of sense, which is not favourable to the work of production during its continuance, we may assume that, recent as may have been the strains which inspired the poem, it was not composed during their actual emission.

Mr. R. Bridges<sup>1</sup> thus analyzes the nightingale’s music: ‘The song of the nightingale is, to the hearer, full of assertion, promise, and cheerful expectancy, and of pleading and tender passionate overflowing in long drawn-out notes, interspersed with plenty of playfulness and conscious exhibitions of musical skill. Whatever pain or sorrow may be expressed by it, it is idealized—that is, it is not the sorrow of a sufferer, but the perfect expression of sorrow by an artist, who must have felt, but is not feeling; and the ecstasy of the nightingale is stronger than its sorrow, although different hearers may be differently affected according to their mood. Keats in a sad mood seized on the happy interpretation and promise of it, and gives it in this line:

“Singing of summer in full-throated ease.”

• The very poetic expression in this stanza, ‘full-throated ease,’

<sup>1</sup> ‘*John Keats. A Critical Essay.* By Robert Bridges. ‘Privately printed MCCCXCV.’ Signed, R. B., Yattendon, 1894. Since reprinted as the Introduction to the Muses’ Library Edition of Keats, 1896.

presents the familiar picture of the sweet song-bird, sitting amidst the forest beeches, its throat distended, as though with effort, 'pouring forth its soul abroad'; yet, in reality, with that restfulness and absence of strain which ever accompany the perfection of art. All this is expressed in these two words. This is 'the absolute expression of absolute natural beauty.'

*Stanza II.* But the poet craves a more complete absorption into the spirit of the nightingale. Keenly alive to the contrast of its 'happy lot' with his own sad feelings, he longs to share the joy of the bird. But how is this to be attained? Shall he try wine? The thought brings up a crowd of harmonious associations which elevate the desire he expresses above the region of the sensual and adorn it with an ideal beauty.

'O for a draught of vintage, that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth.'

Keats, though he probably drank but sparingly, as a rule, describes himself as very fond of claret. To his brother George he had written in February, 1819: 'I never drink above three glasses of wine, and never any spirits and water. . . . How I like claret! . . . It fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness—then goes down cool and feverless: then you do not feel it quarrelling with one's liver.' To his sister he wrote: 'And, please Heaven, a little claret wine, cool out of a cellar a mile deep—with a few or a good many ratafia cakes.' Haydon's account must be accepted with strict reserve, when he tells of Keats yielding to six weeks' dissipation as a refuge from the stings of the Reviewers, and on one occasion covering the interior of his mouth with cayenne pepper, that he might the better appreciate the delicious coolness of the claret. These stories want corroboration, and are contradicted by the accounts of closer and more trustworthy friends of Keats than Haydon. But there is a celebrated passage in *Lamia* describing the effects of wine upon the guests at a wedding feast, from which we take the following lines:—

'Now when the wine has done its rosy deed,  
And every soul from human trammels freed,  
No more so strange; for merry wine, sweet wine,  
Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.'

We must notice the contrast between this draught and that of the opiate in the first stanza. That had effected the obliteration of the past: this is to call up a new and beautiful present.

‘Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!’

This is exquisite. The wine brings associations with the place of its origin. Flora is the goddess of spring-time and of flowers; and the ‘country-green,’ an expression of vivid loveliness, is the goddess’s haunt, in which the next poetic vision that is called up presents us with the rejoicings at the vintage. The wine of the South of France, of Provence, with its vintage songs in the soft tones of the *Langue d’oc*, comes before us. ‘Sun-burnt mirth’ is an expression framed on the model of ‘full-throated ease’—the abstract noun defined by a participial adjective. Similar forms in this Ode are ‘leaden-eyed despairs’ (stanza iii), ‘verdurous glooms’ (stanza iv), and ‘embalmed darkness’ (stanza v).

‘O for a beaker full of the warm South.’

A beaker is a large goblet with a stem. The ‘South’ is of course the wine of the South, the Provençal vintage. From this the poet passes to the Spring of the Muses on Mount Helicon, the classic Hippocrene, by which name he designates with poetic propriety the wine that should awaken the inspiration he desires. The remainder of this stanza is remarkable for its living epithets and descriptions. For example, the ‘warm South’ is the warming or enlivening wine; ‘blushful’ indicates redness and purity; ‘beaded bubbles’ are beadlike bubbles; ‘winking at the brim’ describes aptly their sudden vanishing when they burst on arriving there. Mr. W. Rossetti calls this line trivial; but this is too severe for a graphic and picturesque expansion of the idea of effervescence on the wine being poured out. Webster quotes from H. Smith, ‘‘tis beaded with bubbles.’ ‘Purple-stained mouth’ is a rich Bacchic expression, revealing the growing exhilaration of the draught. The end to be attained is forgetfulness of the world and identification with the blessed bird in its haunts.

‘That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.’

It will be noticed that this last line is an Alexandrine, the only one in the poem. For this reason some have omitted the word 'away'; but, surely, to the great loss of the poem. The long line seems designed to pourtray the lengthening out of the gradual melting away of the man with the bird into the midnight forest. 'To me,' says Mr. Forman, 'the introduction of the word "away" in the version finally given forth by Keats is too redolent of genius to pass for a mere accident. The perfection thus lent to the echo opening the next stanza exceeds a thousand times in value the regularity got by dropping the word; and that one line with its lingering motive has ample reason to be longer than any other in the poem.' Mr. W. Rossetti calls this stanza foreign to the subject-matter, and says, 'Nobody wants wine as a preparation for enjoying a nightingale's music.' This criticism seems best answered by saying that the poet desired wine as a means of escape from the pain of his own thoughts and of the world.

*Stanza III.* The poet will now tell from what ills he would be set free. He defines more closely the meaning of the hints in stanzas i and ii, which show the yearning of his soul for freedom from depression, and describes the miseries of life. These are of course generalized; but the mood enshrined in the poetic strains is illuminated by the actual sorrows of the poet himself.

He imagines the bird as living in a charmed sphere of happiness, a happiness he cannot indeed hope for as his own possession, but may taste for a little while when wine has enabled him to realize the desire of stanza ii, to

'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan.'

The last line depicts supreme misery. It is as though a man, broken with the weight of his own woes, should turn to other men for relief, and, instead of comfort, should hear only their sad complaints. If the sadness of this line can be exceeded, it is in the following lines:—

'Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs.'



Here age and disease tremble on the verge of the tomb.

‘Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.’

Surely this is a reminiscence of poor dead Tom! Is it not also a pictured forecast of Keats’s own near future?

‘Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs;

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.’

These last two lines are perfect. ‘Lustrous eyes’ is full of beauty; so is the music of the whole; and the solitary instance of a feminine ending in the poem lends itself well to the pathos of the stanza. Keats had, we shall remember, only the month before this, become engaged to Fanny Brawne. Did he feel a presentiment of the untimely end of their relations? Or was he thinking of his sister, of whom he wrote to Brown, the following year, in touching terms, adding, ‘It runs in my head we shall all die young’?

*Stanza IV.* Wine however is not potent enough for his purpose. It is thought of, but rejected, as a means of union with the spirit of the nightingale.

‘Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards.’

Mr. W. Rossetti calls this a bad image and complains of ‘a surfeit of mythological allusions.’ He does not, however, say where the image fails, unless we are to infer it from the words, ‘The poet will fly to the nightingale, but not in a leopard-drawn chariot.’ But is the allusion apposite? Surely it is; being but a mythological and poetic way of saying, ‘not under the influence of wine.’

How then shall he accomplish his object, if not by wine?

‘On the viewless wings of poesy.’

No one can deny the beauty and justice of this metaphor. It possibly suggested the other, to which Mr. Rossetti takes exception. His soul reaches out after the ideal blessedness of the bird by poetic inspiration. Still, he doubts whether he can attain it. Nature is weak and may be unequal to poetic flight, for

‘The dull brain perplexes and retards.’

Now however he is there :

‘Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays.’

Mr. Rossetti discusses, apparently without sufficient reason, the question whether the ‘Queen-Moon’ is ‘the classical Phoebe’ or a ‘Faëry Queen.’ The moon is the undisputed monarch of the luminaries of the night, and is therefore the ‘Queen-Moon,’ without further rationalizing. The stars are Fays or Fairies gathering round in attendance on her state.

The word ‘cluster’d’ is unusual in the sense conveyed. ‘To cluster’ is ‘to gather round’; in its ordinary usage, a neuter verb. Keats has here given it a passive sense. It is used as the passive participle of a transitive verb in the instances cited by Webster: ‘Clustered flower-bells’ (Tennyson); ‘Or from the forest falls the clustered snow’ (Thomson); and the architectural term, ‘a clustered column,’ where ‘to cluster’ means ‘to gather together,’ and ‘clustered’ is almost equivalent to ‘clustering,’ in the neuter sense; but I am not aware of its use elsewhere in Keats’s sense, ‘surrounded with clusters,’ analogous to ‘grown over,’ with creepers, moss, or weeds.

The nightingale however is singing in the dark, and the poet therefore cannot see the moon, save when the night-breezes open the dark green leaves overhead and let her beams stream for a moment, while he feels the soft air blowing upon his face, over the moss-grown paths amidst the boles of forest trees.

‘But here there is no light  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.’

*Stanza V.* All is dark and still the wondrous bird sings on, opening in the poet’s mind the fountain of imagination, a fountain more glorious than the streams of sense.

‘I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs’—  
that is, what blossoms they are that yield these soothing perfumes.

But the sense of senses, imagination, the poet's native instinct,  
divines them all.

'But, in enbalmed darkness'—

that is, scented darkness,—'guess each sweet'—divine what is  
the plant or blossom which emits each balmy odour,—

'Wherewith the seasonable month'—

the month in its due season, a rare use of the word 'seasonable'—

'endows

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild ;

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine ;

Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves.'

This was written probably at the beginning of May, when the hawthorn, or 'May,' comes out. The 'pastoral eglantine' is probably the sweet-brier, 'pastoral,' because it is mentioned in the shepherd dialogues or idylls. Milton however seems to distinguish the eglantine from the sweet-brier and to identify it with the honeysuckle, in *L'Allegro* (ll. 47, 48) :

'Through the sweet-briar, or the vine,  
Or the twisted eglantine.'

The violets, which appear in March and flourish in April, will be 'fast-fading' in May, while the leaves will have grown thick and large, to conceal them from view.

'And mid-May's eldest child,'

—that is, the first flower that opens at that time—

'The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine.'

Mr. W. Rossetti considers this last expression one of dubious appositeness, and thinks we have had enough of wine for one poem. This, however, is not the literal wine of stanza ii. The musk-rose appears here as a cup, perhaps for fairy lips to touch, the goblet out of which Oberon and Titania might pledge one another—or is it for the flies of the succeeding line to sip? But what a list of odour-yielding lovelinesses of the spring, strung together with consummate skill!

'The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.'

The onomatopoeia of this line is unaccompanied by harshness. It

is a piece of word-music : a line of beauty and delight. Four of the five senses are summoned in this stanza—and Fancy.

*Stanza VI.* 'Darkling I listen.' This would seem to be a reminiscence of Milton's, 'as the wakeful bird sings darkling.' Mr. William Arnold, in his edition of Keats, has pointed out the mighty influence of Milton on his diction. The transition is easy from the bird singing 'darkling' to the poet listening 'darkling.'

He is indeed at the very apex of happiness, such happiness that now he could wish to die before pain comes back. There is the happiness of gratified sense ; not sight, of course, as it is dark, but hearing and smell. And there is the happiness of imagination stimulated by that ethereal song to the highest point of sympathy with nature.

'And for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,

• Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,

To take into the air my quiet breath ;

Now more than ever seems it rich to die.'

There is wealth to him in the very thought of death under such circumstances. But the thought is extended still further. Death thus would be

• 'To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad

In such an ecstasy !'

All this is sensuous in the highest degree, and at the same time sentimental and reflective. Mr. W. Rossetti justly calls it a 'lovely' passage.

• 'Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—

To thy high requiem become a sod.'

Here again Mr. Rossetti fails to see the appositeness. He takes the words 'become a sod,' as equivalent to 'become a corpse—earth to earth.' But 'sod' is a metaphor for 'deaf as a sod,' which is apposite enough.

There is no touch of human immortality in the foregoing passage. Did Keats believe in it ?

On the death of Tom Keats, he wrote to their other brother George: 'I have a firm belief in immortality, and so had Tom.' Mrs. Owen, in her interesting monograph on Keats, says: 'To the Christian religion he makes hardly any allusion, though there is one passage in his letters on "the disinterested heart of Jesus."' It would appear that at this period, despite his faith in immortality, Keats was not in heart a Christian. Of his last days, passed with his friend Severn at Rome Mr. Colvin writes thus: 'In religion Keats had been neither a believer nor a scoffer, respecting Christianity without calling himself a Christian, and by turns clinging to and drifting from the doctrine of immortality. Contrasting now the behaviour of the believer Severn with his own, he acknowledged anew the power of the Christian teaching and example, and bidding Severn read to him from Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, strove to pass the remainder of his days in a temper of more peace and constancy.

'By degrees the tumult of his soul abated. His sufferings were very great. . . . But generally . . . he lay quiet . . . while his companion soothed him with reading or music. His favourite reading was still Jeremy Taylor.'

*Stanza VII.* The thought of dying suggests the immortality of the nightingale, by way of contrast. It, at least, is not created to be the prey of ravenous creatures.

'No hungry generations tread thee down.'

Mr. Forman, in terms somewhat stronger than we should expect, calls this line 'Dantesque in its weird vigour—a touch of the highest genius'—seeing in it a reference to the Reviewers. To Mrs. Owen it seems 'a touch of bitterness.' But it is not the nightingale of Wentworth Place that he proclaims superior to death: it is the nightingale of history.

'The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown.'

Apparently he begins with the thought that the bird is too beautiful to die, and insensibly passes into what has been noted by various critics as illogical, when he seems to forget that there is little parity between the permanence of the nightingale, regarded as

a species, and the mortality of the poet, regarded as an individual.' The want of logic may be admitted, and yet we may follow Mr. Forman, who, granting the 'unphilosophical obliqueness of the analogy . . . between the lot of the *individual* man and that of the *general* nightingale,' affirms that it 'scarcely detracts from the value, as it certainly does not from the supreme beauty, of the poem—while we know not how much the pathos is enhanced by this very obliqueness of analogy.'

We may remember, however, that even types are not absolutely immortal. Tennyson has said this for us in his *In Memoriam*, where, speaking of Nature, he says:

'So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life.

"So careful of the type?" but no.

From scarped cliff and quarried stone

She cries, "A thousand types are gone:

I care for nothing, all shall go."

The immortality of the typical nightingale leads the poet back into the past, and he sees in vision a Caesar in some Italian villa, or a Charlemagne in the gardens of his palace, listening to the same entrancing song, while the husbandman of the country-side, though untrained to such music, must needs give ear likewise. Or who knows whether, in still more remote days, Ruth, the young Moabitish widow, even in the very gush of her blinding tears, may not have been cheered by the penetrating and sympathetic note?

The three lines that follow, extraordinary both in their beauty and in their obscurity, have called forth remarkable comments from critics.

The same that oft times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

First, Mr. Colvin: 'Those memorable touches of far-off Bible and legendary romance.' Next, Mr. Forman. He tells us that the earlier reading of the last line was 'fairy,' but the *Lamia* volume of 1820 reads 'faery,' 'which enhances the poetic value of the

line in the subtlest manner—eliminating all possible connexion of *fairy-land* with Christmas trees, yinsel, and Santa Claus, and carrying the imagination safely back to the Middle Ages—the tales of knights-errant, to *Amadis of Gavi*, to *Pelmerin of England*, and above all to the East, to the *Thousand and One Nights*.' Lastly, Mr. W. Rossetti. This passage 'shows a reach of expression which might almost be called the Pillars of Hercules of human language. Far greater things have been said by the greatest minds; but nothing more perfect in form has been said—nothing wider in scale and closer in utterance—by any mind of whatsoever pitch of greatness.'

We read the words and seem to behold, in high romance, the shadowy enchanter's castle in a 'kingdom by the sea,' the lonely tower of which encloses an imprisoned princess, held in duress; and when the rich full note of the nightingale breaks upon her captive ear, she throws open her window to listen and to look out over the wild waves for the ship that shall bring the knight of her deliverance.

*Stanza VIII.* The word 'forlorn' that closes stanza vii is the key-note of stanza viii. Its use, in the former instance, is full of pathetic beauty; in the latter, it is a cry of pain. Mr. Bridges considers this opening of the stanza artificial. It is not the less beautiful. The poetic dream is over. The ethereal bird and its never-dying song are passing out of hearing, like the fast-fading impressions of slumber. 'Like as a dream when one awaketh.' Fain would he sleep and dream again; but it may not be.

'Forlorn' the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf

No more for him the sweet beguilement. Stern truth looks him in the face, and, with a feeling akin to despair, he sees his bright illusion pass away:

'Adieu! adieu!'

The word seems to echo the very nightingale's trill as it recedes further from his sense.

‘thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?’

It is generally agreed that if the meed of absolute faultlessness, allotted to *La Belle Dame sans merci* alone among the poems of Keats, cannot be awarded to this Ode, it must stand at least ‘among the veriest glories of our poetry.’ ‘Such revealing imaginative insight and such conquering poetic charm,’ cries Mr. Colvin, ‘the touch that in striking so lightly strikes so deep, who does not prefer to faultlessness?’

‘The whole of this magical Ode,’ writes Mrs. Owen, ‘seems to make life vocal for us as we read it, but it also brings us very near to the wearied young heart that was nearing death.’



## II. ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

IN the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* Keats attains to a higher degree of philosophic thought than in any other of his poems. It touches the Philosophy of Art and the Ethics of human life. Unlike the *Ode to a Nightingale*, in which the pathetic side of human life is presented, it is not a sad poem. No inquietude of spirit stirs its deep calm. The spirit of the untroubled Past, living in artistic expression, unchanged and unchangeable, possesses and soothes the poet's mind. The hush of personal emotion leaves him free for objective thought; and hence he can soar higher and range wider than when chained to the joys and sorrows of the moment. There is no doubt an undertone of pathos when he speaks of the pain attendant on passion and pleasure; but this subtly elevates the general thought, which rises into the sphere of pure contemplation, the contemplation of the beautiful, which he sees to be identical with the true, and in which he finds the true Eudaimonia of mankind. Hence we find in this Ode the poetry of intellect as well as that of beauty. In his discussion of the advantage possessed by the plastic art over human life in the element of permanence, he enters the realm of metaphysics; while in the celebrated words which close the poem he treats the great ethical question of the Summum Bonum of human existence as consisting in a knowledge of the equivalence of Beauty with Truth.

This Ode has not around it the halo of circumstance possessed by that *To a Nightingale*. We do not see so

Clearly the contemporary history eliciting the train of thought. Like the former Ode, it was written in the spring of 1819, and soon afterwards, on a walk with Haydon through the Kilburn meadows, Keats recited both poems in a deep and thrilling chant. Haydon indeed may have been connected with its composition; for he was the first to perceive the importance of the Elgin marbles, and was probably the means of awakening in Keats the love of Greek art, as he already possessed that of Greek legend. Mr. Forman says, 'The poem appeared in No. xv of *Annals of the Fine Arts*, headed "On a Grecian Urn," and signed with a "dagger" (+). It would seem to have appeared in January, 1820. There is some reason for thinking that the particular urn which inspired this beautiful poem is a somewhat weather-beaten work in marble, still preserved in the garden of Holland House, and figured in Piranesi's *Vasi e Candelabri*.' It is numbered 558 in the twelfth volume of Piranesi's works, and the engraving is thus described: 'Vaso antico di marmo ornato di bassirilievi rappresentanti il sacrificio di Suovetaurilii, ed altri ornamenti allusivi al sacrificio. Si vede in Inghilterra presso Suo Eccza Mylord Holland.' The inscription is as follows: 'A sua Eccellenza Miledi Maria Fox, in segno d'ossequio il Cavalier G. B. Piranesi.' The urn exhibits a sacrifice, twelve human figures and two animals, a hog and a bull. In the midst stands an altar with fruit upon it, upon which the priest is apparently laying a cake. A person stands above it playing a pipe. Another raises the axe to slay the sacrifice. There are other attendant figures and two trees depicted on the part of the urn forming the etching.

On the pedestal<sup>1</sup> of the urn, which is richly ornamented in

<sup>1</sup> This pedestal had been removed and nothing was known of it at Holland House when the present writer was permitted to view and photograph the urn in November, 1895; a privilege for which he was indebted to Lord Ilchester.

bas relief, there is a medallion containing the portrait of a lady, and above it the following —

D. M.  
PRISCAE  
AUGUSTOR  
VIX. AN. XVII.

In vol. 13 of the same work (No. 616) there is a remarkable engraving of another urn, thus described : ‘ Bassorilievo scolpito in un vaso di marmo esistente nel Palazzo della Villa Borghese vicina alla Porta Pinciana.’ It contains ten figures, six male and four female ; Fauns and Bacchantes. A woodcut of this vase, engraved by Thompson, is given by R. M. Milnes (Lord Houghton), in ‘ *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, illustrated by 120 designs by Scharf. Moxon, 1854,’ on p. 309 ; and on p. 310 are dancing figures from the same vase. It is described as ‘ From the Borghese collection in the Louvre.’ On p. 311 is depicted a sacrificial scene from the Trajan column. We know that Keats had recently paid a visit to the British Museum, and from the sight of these engravings, or of the urn itself, he derived the inspiration of this Ode, an Ode which is Greek not only in its material, but also in its spirit, which is calm and unimpassioned, like a statue of Phidias.

It is worthy of note that the above-mentioned are examples, not of Greek, but of Roman art, though in Lord Houghton’s book the illustration on p. 310 is designated, ‘ Grecian Vase.’ In Smith’s *Dict. of Antiquities*, vol. ii. p. 726, there is a cut from a relief in the Louvre representing the Suovetaurilia, referred to in Franesi’s description, given above, of the Holland House urn. The sacrifice consisted of a bull, a sheep, and a hog, representing the whole stock of the ancient Italian farmer, and was offered to Mars. It was, no doubt, of very great antiquity.





## ODE ON A GRECIAN URN.

THOU still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth!  
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

## II.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on:  
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

## III.

Ah, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
 For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love ! more happy, happy love !  
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 For ever panting, and for ever young ;  
 All breathing human passion far above,  
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
 A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

## IV.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice ?  
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest ?  
 What little town by river or sea shore,  
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn ?  
 And little town, thy streets for evermore  
 Will silent be ; and not a soul to tell  
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

## V.

O Attic shape ! Fair attitude ! With brede  
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
 With forest branches and the trodden weed ;  
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
 As doth Eternity : Cold Pastoral !  
 When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Like the *Nightingale*, but unlike the *Psyche*, the stanza is regular. It consists of a quatrain and a sextain. There are five rhymes, and an exception to the regularity is found in the variation of the order of the three last rhymes, as will be indicated by the following formula :—

Stanza i.	Stanza ii.	Stanza iii.	Stanza iv.	Stanza v.
a	a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b	b
a	a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b	b
c	c	c	c	c
d	d	d	d	d
e	e	e	e	e
d	c	c	c	d
e	e	d	d	c
e	d	e	e	e

The lines are all the ten-syllable iambic; there are no short lines or Alexandrines. There is a little alliteration, but less marked than in the *Nightingale*. We find however artistic iteration of sounds, e.g. in stanza i, 'What m—' 'What': in stanza ii, 'Heard'—'unheard': 'piper'—'pipe': 'never, never'—'ever': 'though'—'thou': in stanza iii, 'Happy' (five times repeated): 'nor ever'—'for ever' (the latter, five times repeated): in stanza iv, 'little town,' twice: 'What'—'what': in stanza v, 'Attic'—'attitude': 'truth'—'truth': 'know'—'know.'

The end-rhyme is excellent throughout, the only exception being in stanza iv, where 'return' is made to rhyme with 'morn,' which however is not unpleasing. In stanza iii, comparing 'enjoy'd'—'cloy'd' with 'shed'—'unwearied,' we obtain an illustration of the practice of Keats in regard to the final '-ed.' Wherever it is printed in full, it is to be pronounced as a separate syllable, as in 'unwearied,' which is clearly a quadrisyllable; otherwise, Keats always gives it syncopated, as, in 'cloy'd.'

The Ode was republished, in a revised form, in the volume of 1820. The principal changes are as follows, the version given above being the revised one, while the original version from the *Annals* is given below :—



Stanza i. 1. Omit comma after 'still.'

8. 'What Gods or Me; are these?'

9. 'What love? <sup>o</sup> what dance? <sup>o</sup> what struggle to escape?' (so MS.).

Stanza ii. 5, 6. 'Fair youth, beneath the trees thou canst not leave

Thy song, nor ever bid the Spring adieu.'

8. 'O do not grieve!' (so MS.).

Stanza iii. 2. 'Never.'

4. MS. has 'sides' for 'flanks.'

10. MS. has 'ne'er' for 'e'er.'

Stanza v. 2. MS. inserts a comma after 'maidens,' and none after 'overwrought.'

7. 'Wilt' for 'shalt' (so MS.).

9, 10. 'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.—That is all

Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.'

The turned commas enclosing the first five words in the text are omitted, but there is a full stop after them, showing, in another way, that the succeeding words are the utterance of the poet and not of the urn.

These corrections and improvements are no unimportant subject of study; for they display the working of the poet's mind in the development of his art. It is not every day that we can thus be admitted, as it were, to the literary workshop, to see how the poet's technique is perfected; how his genius deals with ideas and language originally more or less commonplace so that they shine with a new and original loveliness; and how, at times, in the process of polishing the language, he unexpectedly gives a novel and striking turn to the thought or the general effect.

#### ANALYSIS.

*Stanza I.* In the first stanza of the *Ode to a Nightingale* the poet depicts his own mental state as a prelude and contrast to the life of the bird he addresses. Here, however, he at once loses his individuality in his subject. He apostrophizes the urn as the 'bride of quietness,' an unusual expression, but evidently implying

that it has long been wedded to a noiseless, inarticulate condition. The urn continues in 'silence' standing still and speaking only with the eloquence of art. 'Silence and slow time' may be a hendiadys for long silence, denoting the length of the urn's existence, from classic to modern days. 'Sylvan. historian' refers to the legend delineated on the surface of the urn, the 'flowery tale,' so termed no doubt on account of the ornamental flower- or leaf-work bordering the figures; while 'sylvan' points to the origin of the wood-nymphs and satyrs, or men, depicted. 'Thus' is by the power of plastic art:

'who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.'

Here the comparative power of expression possessed by Art and Poetry respectively is declared in favour of the former. The poet perceives the inner meaning of the figures on the urn and recognizes the superiority in some respects of an artistic, over a poetic, presentation of the ideas. What are these respects? Keats says that the urn tells the story 'more sweetly' than poetry. We are here in the metaphysics of Art, and the passage is one amongst others that go to show that Keats was not only a seeker after the beautiful, but was ripening for deeper thought, a more mature and philosophic brain-work. In Matthew Arnold's *Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön* the same question is raised, in the inquiry why there are more fine paintings, statues, and musical compositions, than poems. The solution is given in an interesting manner. The painter's sphere is said to be—

'The passing group, the summer-morn,  
The grass, the elms, that blossom'd thorn—

In outward semblance he must give  
A moment's life of things that live.'

The sculptor follows upon similar lines. Music, again, has a different scope. It is to express emotion, to 'declare the spirit's sore, sore load,' or to utter its joy.

'The inspired musician what a range,  
What power of passion, wealth of change!

Some source of feeling he must choose  
 And its lock'd fount of beauty use,  
 And through the stream of music tell  
 Its else unutterable spell.'

But the poet! 'Who suffices here?'

'For ah! so much he has to do;  
 Be painter and musician too!  
 The aspect of the moment show,  
 The feeling of the moment know!  
 The aspect not, I grant, express  
 Clear as the painter's art can dress;  
 The feeling not, I grant, explore  
 So deep as the musician's lore—'

In these respects the poet is at a disadvantage. But then

'he must life's *movement* tell!  
 The thread which binds it all in one,  
 And not its separate parts alone.'

Few succeed in tracing life's stream 'with safe unwandering feet.'  
 But these few are the interpreters of life, for they have sounded  
 its depths. No painter, no musician, however great, can be placed  
 beside them.

'Beethoven, Raphael, cannot reach  
 The charm which Homer, Shakspeare teach.  
 To these, to these, their thankful race  
 Gives, then, the first, the fairest place;  
 And brightest is their glory's sheen,  
 For greatest hath their labour been.'

Here then we see the strength of the plastic art and also its  
 limitation, and how far the urn could tell the tale 'more sweetly'  
 than the poet's 'rhyme.'

The poet's art, then, is the interpretation of nature. Yet our  
 writer does not fully interpret the story of the urn, but puts  
 suggestive questions, which at once describe the scene depicted  
 and answer themselves. 'Leaf-fring'd' relates to the border  
 round the urn. In Piranesi, vol. xiii. No. 616, referred to above,  
 the leaf-border is evidently of vine-leaves. The other terms used

in this line are highly suggestive and full of poetry—'legend,' like 'historian' (line 3) and 'tale' (line 4), opens out the conception, not of a mere situation, but of sustained and connected interest. Here, in accordance with the principle laid down by M. Arnold above, we see what Poetry adds to Art, the *movement* of life, or stream of events. 'Haunts' suggests an ethereal and romantic character of the legend. 'Shape' sets the mind endeavouring to imagine the form and beauty of the urn. Still even thus the significance of the terms is not exhausted, for it is the part of the best poetry to kindle, rather than to satisfy, imagination. Are the strange beings gods or men, or a mingling of gods and men (line 6)? It is better to ask the question than to answer it; for, unresolved, it leaves possibilities for the imagination to fill up, after the manner of Art.

*Stanza II.* The power of Art to stimulate imagination, just referred to, is remarkably expressed in the next four lines opening stanza ii:—

'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.'

'Those unheard are sweeter!' What a door is opened, out of which imagination flies instantly to the utmost bound of thought! Infinite depth of emotion is here in infinite beauty of musical feeling. We may here recall the passage on music quoted above from M. Arnold. An illustration may also be drawn from the *Life of Frances Ridley Havergal*, p. 151, in which Miss Havergal, a trained musician, writes:

'In the train I had one of those curious musical visions which only very rarely visit me. I hear strange and very beautiful chords, generally full, slow and grand, succeeding each other in most interesting sequences. I do not invent them, I could not; they pass before my mind, and I only listen. Now and then my will seems aroused when I see ahead how some fine resolution might follow, and I seem to *will* that certain chords should come, and then they do come; but then my will seems suspended again, and they go on quite independently. It is so interesting, the

chords seem to *fold over each other* and die away down into music of infinite softness, and then they *unfold* and open out, as if great curtains were being withdrawn one after another, widening the view, till, with a gathering power and intensity and fullness, it seems as if the very skies were being opened out before one, and a sort of great blaze and glory of music, such as my outward ears never heard, gradually swells out in perfectly sublime splendour. This time there was an added feature: I seemed to hear depths and heights of sound beyond the scale which human ears can receive, keen, far-up octaves, like vividly twinkling *starlight* of music, and mighty, slow vibrations of gigantic strings going down into grand thunders of depths, octaves below anything otherwise appreciable as musical notes. Then, all at once, it seemed as though my soul had got a new sense, and I could *see* this inner music as well as hear it; and then it was like gazing down into marvellous *abysses of sound*, and up into dazzling regions of what, to the eye, would have been light and colour, but to this new sense was *sound*. Wasn't it odd! It lasted perhaps half an hour, but I don't know exactly, and it is very difficult to describe in words.'

Another illustration of the power of musical imagination is to be found in Eliza Clarke's *Life of Handel*: 'While writing the Messiah, Handel was quite lifted out of himself by the sublimity of the theme. His music often affected him deeply, and the valet, who used to take up his morning chocolate, said he often stood silently on one side while his master went on writing rapidly, the tears rolling down his cheeks and wetting the paper. A friend who called, and was admitted, while he was composing the music for *He was despised*, found him much affected and sobbing audibly; and when another friend asked him what feelings prompted him to so sublime a composition, he answered, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me, and the great God Himself."'

The words may apply in another sense to Keats himself. His own 'heard melodies,' the actual accomplishments of his muse, 'are sweet'; but what of 'those unheard,' the unaccomplished possibilities of a matured poetic existence which his shortened life forbade him to realize? We need imagination to conceive what these might have been. His range was large, larger than is generally recognized by those who look for nothing in his

writings but beauty. His thought was maturing. His technique was already almost perfection. The informing spirit of Beauty was present. The 'unheard melodies' are probably 'sweeter.' Yet perhaps we should not wish them written, for thus imagination has still some work to do and thus they are sweeter because unheard.

'Sensual ear' is simply equivalent to 'ear of sense.' But what can exceed the perfection of expression attained in the next line—

'Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone'

There is a light touch, an airy sympathy, a lurking humour, in the rest of the stanza, in which the figures and foliage of the urn seem to live most really, yet with an arrested, crystallized life, the painter's and sculptor's

• 'moment's life of things that live.'

These lines, too, present to us another quality of Art, namely its permanence, as contrasted with the transitoriness of life. The piper beneath the trees; the trees themselves, in their inanimate life; the lover and his object, in real life have all long passed away; but here upon the surface of the urn, in the life of Art, they remain for all time. The artist has caught and exhibited the situation of the moment and it abides deathless. Lessing says<sup>1</sup>, 'It is to a single moment that the material limits of art confine its imitations. . . . Furthermore, this single moment receives through art an unchangeable duration.'

*Stanza III.* This permanence of Art is more fully dwelt on in the following stanza, and is apostrophized by the poet as that in which the mind may rest. All things fleet, as Herakleitos said (*τὰ πάντα ρεῖ*), and the wearied spirit seeks rest in the changeless images of the urn, which he invests with a happy optimism. The boughs are happy, because they never shed their leaves or lose the spring. The melodist is happy, because he never tires and fancy ever hears fresh sweet music from his pipes. The lovers are happy, because they are subject to no fluctuation and no reaction in their love, which is

'All breathing human passion far above.'

<sup>1</sup> *Laokoön*, ch. iv, where this subject is fully discussed.

'Breathing' of course belongs to 'passion.' We cannot but remember how little satisfaction came to Keats from his own love. 'Parching' is neuter for 'paralysed.'

Trees, piper, lover, all are blest. For, whatever Art may sacrifice of the loveliness and freshness of Nature, it attains permanence, which Nature attains not. The trees can never lose their leaves; the fancied song can never cease; the lover must always be filled with the joy of expectancy. In this we see the advantage of Art over Nature, as in stanza i we saw its advantage over Poetry. And permanence is not the only such advantage. Art is elevated, calm, intellectual, free from satiety. Its joys have no sting; they leave no after pains. It possesses the power to awaken the imagination to yet more sweet and exalted perception than reality owns.

*Stanza IV.* The vividness of the fourth stanza is produced by the interrogative style, a most effective one for this purpose. A minor chord is struck in the passage about the 'little town' which is ever to be deserted and silent. It is half pathetic, half playful; there is no real sadness in it. The repetition of the words 'little town' lends itself completely to the expression of this playful pathos.

The entire stanza presents a perfect picture of a sacrificial holiday, full of sympathy and suggestiveness.

Who are the people thus engaged? What god or goddess is to receive the victim on altar of turf? Where is the scene laid? Is it by the sea-shore, or on a river bank, or on some green perch upon the mountain side? The urn gives no reply, nor does the poet. The mind of the reader is conducted from one supposition to another, and seems to itself to be doing its own work, when, in reality, it is but following the suggestions of the stanza.

The picture of the victim is complete and attractive. The attitude of the heifer, stretching out her neck to low 'at the skies,' is quite natural; so is the soft glossiness indicated by 'silken flanks.' Keats had, no doubt, seen pictures of such victims decorated for the sacrificial knife.

Not only is there permanence in what is depicted on the urn; there is permanence in what is omitted. There is no town

delineated on the urn, whether the urn be an ideal or an actual one. The 'little town'—in his kindly fancy it is little—the-home of those who are come forth to sacrifice—is a creation of the poetic imagination, and is not even supposed to be present to the eye. Yet it shares in the permanence assigned to the story of the work of art itself. This is an ingenious refinement of fancy. Yet it comes so naturally that we might have looked for the town on the urn. It is empty, silent; all the inhabitants are gone to the sacrifice for evermore.

Its citadel is 'peaceful,' for it would have been out of harmony with the scene of rejoicing to introduce preparations for battle.

The trope or metonymy, 'pious morn,' is another playful expression; and much more is got by calling the morn, than the people, pious.

*Stanza V.* 'O Attic shape!' Athens was 'the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence,' and 'Attic' stands therefore for 'Greek.' 'Fair attitude!' The words appear to be equivalent to saying that the urn appears beautiful as it stands to be viewed. The word 'attitude' is introduced in a singular manner, apparently as a repetition of the sound in 'Attic.' Mr. Bridges says: 'The last stanza enters stumbling on a pun.' This, however, is not strictly correct, as there is no paronomasia. 'Brede' is taken from Chaucer's (?) 'The Flowre and the Lefe.' Compare Collins's 'Ode to Evening,' 'whose cloudy skirts with brede ethereal wove,' in reference to the sunset. • 'Brede' is the same as 'braid'; the urn is braided over with human figures. •

The meaning in lines 4 and 5 is that our thought can no more compass the ideas and feelings awakened by the urn than it can comprehend eternity itself. • The same kind of baffled feeling is produced as when we strive to grasp the infinite. In line 7, the idea that the urn shall remain in future generations in the midst of the world's woe, is highly characteristic of Keats. He speaks of woe, first, as transferring his own sadness to the world, and next, as a foil, or background, because the urn is now to be introduced as the prophet of consolation, with an oracular message designed for man's comfort. This perhaps is the only personal touch in the Ode.



The message of the urn is summed up in five pregnant words, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.' It is as near to a moral as Keats allows himself to go. The following words, 'that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know,' are the comment of the poet, not the lesson of the urn. This verse, the last two lines of which contain its real interest, possesses two philosophical ideas, (1) the Incomprehensibility of the Infinite, in Art and Nature; and (2) the Ethics of Beauty. •To Keats, Beauty is the touchstone of Truth. 'To see things in their beauty,' writes Matthew Arnold in reference to this passage, 'is to see things in their truth, and Keats knew it. "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty, must be Truth," he says in prose; and in immortal verse he has said the same thing :—

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

No, it is not all; but it is true, deeply true, and we have deep need to know it. And with beauty goes not only truth, joy goes with her also; and this too Keats saw and said, as in the first line of his *Endymion* it stands written

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

It is no small thing to have so loved the principle of beauty as to perceive the necessary relation of beauty with truth, and of both with joy. Keats was a great spirit, and counts for far more than many even of his admirers suppose, because this just and high perception made itself clear to him.

### III. ODE TO PSYCHE

WE have Keats's own statement that in the composition of this poem he had exercised more care than, up to that time, had been usual with him. \* His labour was repaid by the production of a masterpiece. It is of the *Ode to Psyche* that he writes, on April 15, 1819, to his brother George: 'The following poem, the last I have written, is' the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains; I have, for the most part, dashed off my lines in a hurry: this one I have done leisurely; I think it reads the more richly for it, and it will, I hope, encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit. You must remember that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist, who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour, and perhaps never thought of in the old religion: I am more orthodox than to let a heathen goddess be so neglected.'

Its point of contact with the *Grecian Urn* is its sympathy with the past and the recognition of beauty in a system of thought long passed away. The principle of beauty—

1. In Nature, is displayed in the Odes *To a Nightingale* and *To Autumn*.

2. In Greek art, in that *On a Grecian Urn*.

3. In Greek mythology, in that *To Psyche*.

4. In Emotion, in that *On Melancholy*.
5. In the Poetic Life, in the fragment *To Maia*.
6. In Human Motive, in that *On Indolence*.

Like the *Grecian Urn* also it reveals no mental state of the poet himself, no mood that governs the thought of the Ode, such as we find in the *Nightingale*, *On Melancholy*, and *On Indolence*.

We may note Mr. Swinburne's reference to the pictorial character of the Ode and its tenderness. The word-painting will be well represented by the remarkable expressions, 'thine own soft-conched ear'; 'the whisp'ring roof Of leaves and trembled blossoms'; 'hush'd, cool-rooted flowers fragrant-eyed'; 'Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees Fledge the wild-ridged mountains, steep by steep'; 'The moss-lain Dryads.'

Like the other Odes, the *Psyche* shows a keen appreciation of nature. Mr. Ruskin says of the passage about the pine-trees, that it contains in a few words all that can be said of the pine. 'Phoebe's sapphire-region'd star,' again, displays, as does the passage in the *Nightingale* about the 'Queen Moon,' an apprehension of the loveliness of the heavens.

The Greek element appears (1) in the mythology, Cupid and Psyche, the pagan deities or personifications; (2) in the heathen worship, the spirit of which Keats has caught well in his description of the 'altar heap'd with flowers,' the 'virgin-choir,' the 'chain-swung censer,' and the 'pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming'; (3) in the heartfelt simplicity of the thoughts; (4) in the Beauty-worship of the entire poem.

A rich fancy animates the whole Ode, which realizes a line of another poem of Keats,

O sweet Fancy! let her loose.

It is all fancy, and at the close Fancy herself is called in, personified as a gardener, to dress a bower for the goddess. So

large and willing is the sympathy of the poet with every phase of the human mind that he here specially delights in honouring, so far as that is possible under such changed conditions, a goddess, that is, a poetic and mythological conception, who never was honoured in that condition of the mind of the world which might have been expected to yield her homage. The image of loveliness and beauty, wherever found, though disinterred from the forgotten past, and never recognized in its own day, is worthy still of honour from the mind that loves to enshrine all bright thoughts and perpetuate all fair impressions. And this, if any, is the lesson of the Ode.

We have seen that this Ode was Keats's last poetic production before April 15, 1819, when he was residing with his friend Brown at Hampstead. Mr. Forman considers that it was in part suggested by a plate of Cupid and Psyche in Spence's *Polymetis*, engraved from the statue at Florence, as well as by Lempriere. The passage in the Classical Dictionary is as follows:—

Psyche, a nymph whom Cupid married and carried into a place of bliss, where he long enjoyed her company. Venus put her to death because she had robbed the world of her son; but Jupiter, at the request of Cupid, granted immortality to Psyche. The word signifies *the soul*, and this personification of Psyche is posterior to the Augustan Age, though still it is connected with ancient mythology.

In stanza 5 of the lines *To some Ladies*, we find mentioned the name of Mrs. Tigho (died 1810), authoress of *Psyche, or the Legend of Love*, in the Spenserian metre, which is styled by Mr. Palgrave, 'a really graceful piece of pure and delicate work.' This poem may therefore have played its part in suggesting to the poet the subject of this Ode.

*ODE TO PSYCHE.*

I.

O GODDESS! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung  
 By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,  
 And pardon that thy secrets should be sung  
 Even into thine own soft-couch'd ear:  
 Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see  
 The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?  
 I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,  
 And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,  
 Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side  
 In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof  
 Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran  
 A brooklet scarce espied:  
 'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,  
 Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,  
 They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;  
 Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;  
 Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,  
 As if disjointed by soft-handed slumber,  
 And ready still past kisses to outnumber  
 At tender eye-dawn of aureoan love:  
 The winged boy I knew;  
 But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?  
 His Psyche true!

## II.

O latest born and loveliest vision far  
 Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!  
 Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire-region'd star,  
 Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;  
 Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,  
 Nor altar heap'd with flowers;  
 Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan  
 Upon the midnight hours;  
 No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet  
 From chain-swung censer teeming:  
 No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat  
 Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

## III.

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,  
 Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,  
 When holy were the haunted forest boughs,  
 Holy the air, the water, and the fire;  
 Yet even in these days so far retir'd  
 From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,  
 Fluttering among the faint Olympians,  
 I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.  
 So let me be thy choir, and make a moan  
 Upon the midnight hours;  
 Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet  
 From swung censer teeming;  
 Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat  
 Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

## IV.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
In some untrodden region of my mind,  
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind :  
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees  
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains' steep by steep ;  
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,  
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep ;  
And in the midst of this wide quietness  
A rosy sanctuary will I dress  
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,  
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,  
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same :  
And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
To let the warm Love in !

---

We see then that there are four stanzas ; irregular in structure, unlike those of the *Nightingale*, *Grecian Urn*, *Melancholy*, and *Indolence*, which all have the ten-line stanza, with characteristic variations in the length of certain lines and the order of the rhymes. The irregularity extends to both the number and the length of the lines and the disposition of the rhymes.

• The rhyme formulae are as follows :

Stanza i.	Stanza ii.	• Stanza iii.	Stanza iv.
• a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b
a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b
c	c	c	c
d	d	d	d
c	c	d	c
d	d	c	d
e	e	-e	e
-f	f	f	e
g	e	g	f
e	f	h	g
e		g	f
g		h	g
-h			h
i			i
i			h
k			i
k			
l			
• i			
l			
i			

Those preceded by the mark (-) have no rhyming line. All the rest are perfect rhymes. A few feminine endings are introduced with great effect, especially in the conclusion of the second and third stanzas, where there is a kind of refrain. A remarkable set of assonances is to be found near the end of the Ode in the words 'brain . . frame . . feign . . same.'

The most noticeable alliterations are as follows :—

Stanza i. Secrets should . . sung . . soft . . surely . . see . . Psyche  
 . . eyes . . forest . . thoughtlessly . . sudden . .  
 surprise . . saw . . creatures . . side by side . .  
 grass . . whisp'ring, &c., &c.  
 Leaves . . trembled blossoms . . brooklet . . flowers . .  
 blue . . silver.  
 Blue . . budded . . breathing . . bedded . . embraced.



Stanza ii. *Latest . . loveliest . . Olympus.*  
*Fairer . . Phœbus . . sapphire . . Vesper.*

Stanza iii. *Holy . . haunted . . holy.*  
*Fans . . fluttering . . faint.*  
*See . . sing . . inspired*

Stanza iv. *Pleasant . . pain . . pines.*  
*Brain . . buds . . bells.*  
*Fancy . . feign . . flowers.*

There are some suggestive various readings in the long letter to George Keats, from which we have already quoted.

In stanza i. 'Awaked' *for* 'awaken'd.'  
 'Whisp'ring fan' *for* 'whisp'ring roof.' The later version sacrifices the rhyme.  
 'Freckle-pink, and budded Syrian' *for* 'silver-white and budded Tyrian.'  
 'His Psyche true?' *for* 'His Psyche true'

Stanza ii. 'Hadst none' *for* 'hast none.'

Stanza iii. 'O Bloomiest!' *for* 'O brightest!'

Stanza iii. 'O let me' *for* 'So let me.'

Stanza iv. 'Charm'd' is cancelled *for* 'lull'd.'  
 'Frame' *for* 'feign.'

And at the end Keats has written 'Here endeth ye Ode to Psyche.' We are glad to have these remarkable corrections, as we must regard the second of these, in each case, as being; for they show us how Keats polished and improved his work, and thus give us insight into the poet's craft.

The needless repetitions of 'grass,' and the missing rhymes of the first stanza, &c., are slight but real imperfections in a beautiful poem.

#### ANALYSIS.

*Stanza I.* Mr. Bridges compares the successive parts of this Ode as follows: 'The beginning of this Ode is not so good (i. e. as the end), and the middle part is midway in excellence.' The 'wonderful lines at the close are certainly better than the opening

ones, but stanzas ii. and iii. hardly fall behind stanza iv., in which the subjective element is slightly alien. The poem opens with a brief invocation of the goddess Psyche, to whom he is constrained to dedicate the Ode by a recent imaginary vision of her, which he describes, but whether beheld by him sleeping or waking he does not determine.

'Thine own soft-conched ear' can only mean an ear combining the curved beauty of a sea-shell with the tender softness of a young maiden's flesh. It is a novel, but a strikingly appropriate epithet. 'Soft-conched' is a form quite in Keats's manner, a participial adjective, of which Mr. W. T. Arnold, in the introduction to his edition of Keats, gives many examples. Two such are discussed above under stanza ii. of the *Nightingale*. In the present Ode we have the following similar forms: 'Cool-rooted,' 'fragrant-eyed,' 'soft-handed,' 'sapphire-region'd,' 'pale-mouth'd,' 'dark cluster'd,' 'wild-ridged'; as well as the kindred 'moss-lain,' 'calm-breathing,' and 'new-grown.' The resemblance of an ear to a shell is matched by that which has been observed by conchologists of a shell to an ear. The shell family Auriculidae is so named because the aperture is ear-shaped (see Tryon's *Structural and Systematic Conchology*, vol. iii. pp. 92, 93); and in Mr. W. S. Green's *High Alps of New Zealand*, p. 34. he speaks of finding 'Venus' ears' on the sand at Point Nepean, Australia. 'Fainting with surprise.' It is a weakness of Keats to faint on occasions of emotion. 'Trembled blossoms' is unusual for 'trembling' and even more expressive. Perhaps woodland flowers never were depicted in verse by a more exquisite series of epithets than are these in the bower of Cupid and Psyche.

'Hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,'  
—the very centre of the blossom identified as the source of its scent—

'Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian.'  
'Tyrian' is of course purple, the rich colour of Tyre; a word well worthy to describe the summer blossoms.

These remarkable expressions seem to cover the whole being and nature of the flowers, their noiselessness—a wonderful point, their refreshing coolness in the moist and clean-smelling earth, their imagined power to look upon the lovers as well as to

envelop them with sweet odours, the attractive contrast of colours, the bright blue, in juxtaposition with the silvery white and the purple, that burst from their opening buds.

Then the picture of the sleeping lovers, their arms and pinions (for he keeps up the tradition of their wings) touching, their pouting lips all fresh from the kiss and ready on awaking to kiss again, but held for the present under the mesmeric influence of slumber so soft that it parts but wakes them not, while thus awaiting the gentle waking of love, like the morning, in their eyes.

‘And ready still past kisses to outnumber

At tender eye-dawn of aurean love’ :—

that is, at that sweet moment when, as the sun, the eye of day, arises, so their eyes should open to love renewed and fresh as the morning.

*Stanza II.* ‘O latest born and loveliest vision far

‘Of all Olympus’ faded hierarchy!’

‘Latest born’ refers to what Keats said in the letter quoted above about Psyche not having been deified until the post-Augustan age. ‘Loveliest.’ Keats is right. There is nothing in the story of Psyche to set the mind against her, as there is in Venus, and her beauty was beyond telling; besides which, not having been born a goddess, but a living woman, there is the attractiveness to a human mind which the original Immortals do not possess.

The Olympian deities are ‘faded’ because no longer worshipped. Keats regards them with poetic regret, as the embodiments of many a beautiful myth and many a tender sentiment. One of them at least shall live in his verse, to him the most beautiful of all; and he now proceeds to extol her loveliness by comparing it with the beauty of other deities hitherto held incomparable, but to whom he declares her superior :

‘Fairer than Phoebe’s sapphire-region’d star,  
Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky.’

Phoebe is, of course, the moon. The deep blue colour of the nightly heaven, illumined by the moon, is the sapphire region in which her star shines so fair. What, however, is Phoebe’s star? ‘Yet even this is less than the fair beauty of Keats’s goddess. Or if

we go to the evening, the time of love, when Vesper, the evening star, Venus, illumines the sky, as the glow-worm shines on some green bank when the sun has gone down, still does Psyche out-shine all.

Yet this lovely deity has not, and never had, any real and fervent devotion. No mortal hands have laboured to erect a temple in her honour, to build an altar or to heap it with flowers on her festal day; no maidens have learned her choral song to impress the hearers at night with its wild and plaintive tones; no acolyte pays due devotion at her shrine:

‘No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet  
From chain-swung censer teeming;  
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat  
Of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming.’

In this passage Keats displays an extraordinary appreciation of the aesthetic attraction of heathen worship; its appeal to the senses and the imagination: the eye being filled with the beauty of its architecture and its floral decorations; the ear with its choral and instrumental harmonies; the sense of smell with its incense; the overawed imagination, with the reverence for its sacred places; the oracular utterances of its unseen deity, the vague and terrifying raptures of its prophet. ‘Pale-mouth’d’ would seem to imply pallid around the mouth, a symptom of the excitement produced by the prophetic frenzy. This stanza owes something to Milton’s example and inspiration.

*Stanza III.* Psyche has no temple, no cult. She is too late for this. Her apotheosis is after the days when men could really believe in and worship such deities. In those old times every natural object was invested with divine, or semi-divine, presences. The deities of polytheism filled the forest, the air, the water, and the flame. But now unbelief has stripped nature of her haunting personalities and, with the belief, the worship too has gone. Even the Olympian gods have grown faint, receding into the dim distance of forgetfulness. Yet among these fading visions of the past one lovely object still shines forth brilliant to the view. It is Psyche, whose lustrous wings—‘lucent fans’ he styles them—dazzle the poet’s gaze.

The sight inspires his enthusiasm. He will, in a poetic sense, be her worshipper. He will bring her his offering of verse, verse that shall depict that world of thought in which she dwells and in which he himself is her choir, her voice, her lute, her pipe, her incense, her shrine, her grove, her oracle, and her prophet.

*Stanza IV.* In a word, he will be her priest, whose whole care shall be to provide for her worship. He will build her a temple in a beautiful and trackless land, unknown to mortal ken. Here we pass into the region of Romance, which alternates with Classicism and Nature in this exquisite stanza, in which we may say that these three prime elements of Keats's poetry reach their highest expression.

But where is this retreat? The poet here gives an unexpected and striking turn to the thought, by transferring the scenery from the realm of reality to that of imagination. It is in his own mind that the fane shall be erected. This transference from objective to subjective recalls narratives which turn out to be dreams. But the effect is also partly produced by the change from the limited to the illimitable, for such are the creations of the poetic mind. The mountains and trees, with their scenery, are imagined, but how true to life they are! It appears to be Alpine scenery that is here described, scenery which Keats had never gazed upon, but which his quick and true perception may have taken from pictures.

'Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
 "Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:  
 Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees  
 Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep.'

It may be felt by some that the comparison of thoughts to pines is somewhat far-fetched, but there is nothing unnatural in it, and it introduces a passage rich in descriptive glory.

'Dark-cluster'd' gives the deep green of the pines; and we note that 'cluster'd' is employed in a different way from the passage in the *Nightingale*, where the Queen-Moeb is said to be 'cluster'd around by all her starry Fays.' 'Fledge' compares the trees to the feathers of a bird, an image as novel as it is vivid.

And now he, who 'never saw an oak-tree without beholding the Dryad,' summons his beloved wood-nymphs to grace the scene of his fancy:—

'And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,  
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep.'

It is a beautiful landscape. But Psyche is not to roam indifferently throughout this fair country. There is a spot in which all that can gratify her shall be gathered together for her delight.

'And in the midst of this wide quietness  
A rosy sanctuary will I dress  
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,  
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,  
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
Who breeding flowers will never breed the same.'

Note the 'artfully iterated vowels,' as Mr. Colvin terms them, in the final syllables of these last four lines. In the account of the 'gardener Fancy,' who ever breeds diverse flowers for this pleasure, we are reminded of the lines from the poet's *Fancy*:—

'She will bring thee, all together,  
All delights of summer weather;  
All the buds and bells of May,  
From dewy sward or thorny spray.'

Perhaps the gem of the whole poem is not reached until the last four lines, in which, in perfect rhythmical and syllabic music, the legendary nocturnal visits of Cupid are referred to:—

'And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
To let the warm Love in!'

If, amidst all this splendour of scene-painting, Psyche herself seems a little forgotten throughout the greater part of this stanza, in these last lines she is brought back to us again embowered in roses and radiant in loveliness.

## IV. ODE TO AUTUMN

'THE *Ode to Autumn*,' writes Mr. Groser<sup>1</sup>, 'where all that is lovely in orchard and garden, wheat-field and river-side, beneath a September sky, is laid under contribution in lines of absolute beauty, was inspired by a quiet walk through the stubble-fields around Winchester.' Keats writes to Reynolds, September 22, 1819, 'How beautiful the season is now. How fine the air—a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies. I never liked stubble fields so much as now—aye, better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow, a stubble plain looks warm; in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.'

*To Autumn* is the last of Keats's Odes. Mr. Swinburne places it with the *Grecian Urn* as 'perhaps the nearest to absolute perfection.' In it is exhibited the principle of beauty in Nature. It breathes a happy and tranquil spirit, wholly free from the melancholy that inspired so much of his other work. Mr. Palgrave speaks of it thus: 'Another masterpiece. If, in the vulgar sense, not Greek, essentially it is more so than *Hyperion*: it is such as a Theocritus might have longed to write.' And again, 'Those noble lines to *Autumn*, which I put, with *Lamia* and five or six more pieces, amongst his maturest work; the work wherein art touches its genuine triumph in concealing itself: the work which in matter and

<sup>1</sup> *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century*, by Horace G. Groser, p. 5.

manner alike, embodies his most essential, his most intimate, genius.'

On the other hand, the very fact of the close adherence to nature in this Ode, and its consequent absence of subjectivity, deprives it of the width of range found in the other odes. There is little of the reflectiveness of the *Nightingale* and none of its pathos; no philosophy, as in the *Grecian Urn*; no landscape-painting, as in the *Psyche*; no allegory, as in the *Indolence* and the *Melancholy*. The limits are justly imposed by the subject, and the result is a very perfect piece of natural description, in which the features of the season are delineated with vivid accuracy or presented in a series of living tableaux. The Romantic<sup>1</sup> element is wholly wanting; it could have no place here. But the personification of Autumn in the second stanza is in the Greek manner, as also is the description of nature for nature's sake throughout the entire poem.

*To Autumn* was published in the volume of 1820.

### TO AUTUMN.

SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

See p. 11.

F



To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
 • Until they think warm days will never cease,  
 For Summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.

• II.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
 Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
 Spares the next swath, and all its twined flowers:  
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

III.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
 Among the river-sallows, borne aloft  
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
 The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;  
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

• The ode then consists of three stanzas, each containing eleven lines, the eleventh line being obtained by grafting upon the second part of the ~~sextain~~ an additional line, rhyming with one or other of its normal lines, but not always the same in relative position, thus :—

• Stanza i.	• Stanza ii.	Stanza iii.
a	a	a
b	b	b
a	a	a
b	b	b
c	c	c
d	d	d
e	e	e
d	c	c
c	d	d
c	d	d
e	e	e

It will be observed that the order of the rhymes in the second and third stanzas is the same, but differs from that of the first stanza. There are no short or Alexandrine lines. The rhymes are perfect and simple, chiefly in monosyllabic words ; and there are no feminine endings.

In this Ode there is remarkably little resort to alliteration, sound-repetition, and other technical devices. A wonderful and speaking simplicity seems to mark the poem, the syllables being rather contrasted than assimilated. Yet we may notice the sound of s, z, and soft c, which predominate throughout the Ode, and especially in the first two stanzas : in stanza i. we find '*mists . . mellow . . bosom . . maturing*' ; in stanza ii. '*winnowing wind*' ; in stanza iii. '*Barred . . bloom*' ; '*full-grown lambs loud bleat . . hilly*.' The last line of stanza ii. seems lengthened out as though to express the slow duration of time with the watcher at the cyder-press :—

'Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.'

The original manuscript of the ode *To Autumn* discloses what

corrections and improvements Keats made in working out his poem. Thus we get, as the original form :—

Stanza i. line 4, *The vines with fruit.*

„ 6, *Sweetness for ripeness.*

„ 8, *White for sweet.*

„ ii. „ 1, *Who hath not seen thee, for thy haunts are many.*

„ 2, *For thee for abroad.*

after line 4, *While bright the sun slants through the husky  
barn*

*Or sound asleep in a half-reaped field*

*Dozed with red poppies while thy reaping hook*

*Spare from some slumbrous minutes*

*While warm slumbers creep . . .*

and

*Spare for some slumbrous minutes the next  
swath.*

line II, *Oozing for oozings.*

„ iii. „ 3 & 4, *While a gold cloud gilds the soft-dying day  
Touching the stubble plains with rosy hue—*

„ „ 6 *On thee borne aloft.*

„ „ 7 *Lives and dies.*

„ „ 9 *Again full soft for with treble soft.*

„ „ II *And new flock still . . .*

(See Forman's Keats, vol. iv. p. 427.) In stanza i. line 4, Keats printed *eves* for *eaves*. At the same time Webster gives *evesdrop*.

There is less mannerism in this Ode than in any of those that have come under our notice as yet. It is pervaded by an exquisite simplicity and directness. With the expressions 'mellow fruitfulness' and 'soft-lifted' compare those discussed on pages 26 and 59.

## ANALYSIS.

• *Stanza I.* Autumn appears in the first line as an abstraction—the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,' these being the notes of that period of the year. The next line reveals the germ of personification developed in the following stanza; and then

Autumn and the Sun are spoken of as two friends, who, like the Santa Claus and Father Christmas of our youth, lay their heads together to lade the fruit trees of the village and the country-side with their ripe treasure. The season is in this stanza presented to us in its vegetative aspect. One after another, we have

1. The grape,
2. The apple,
3. All ripe fruit,
4. The gourd,
5. The hazel-nut, and the honey flowers. .

Thereupon follows a delightful and sympathetic reference to the bees, the representatives of insect life; whose whole existence is, more than any insect, bound up with the flowers—

‘Until they think warm days will never cease.’

Here is a subjective touch. The poet projects himself into the mind, the supposed thoughts, of the bees in such a natural manner that it seems less poetic fancy, of a high order, as it is, than a literal description of what is actually existent. Note the picturesque descriptions throughout this stanza :

1. The vine passing round the house wall and bearing clusters of ripe grapes :
2. The apple-trees in the cottage garden, their stems green with emerald moss and their boughs bending beneath their abundant burden :
3. The rich and suggestive expressions, each one a picture in itself :

‘Fill with ripeness to the core.’

‘Swell the gourd.’

‘Plump the hazel-shells.’

‘O’erbrim’d their clammy cells.’

*Stanza II.* If the first stanza describes the bounty of Autumn, the second displays Autumn herself. The familiar figures of the season are passed before us in a series of glowing pictures, each one of which presents Autumn under its own aspect.

‘Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?’

Who indeed, but he whose eye is bereft of poetic and artistic

light! For there is joy in gazing in thought on such objects. First comes the season personified as a harvester during the winnowing,

'Sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind.'

Autumn is here almost a supernatural visitor, yet appearing as naturally as Athene in Homer, when she pulls Achilles by the lock.

Next, as a tired reaper, and here everything is purely human.

'On a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers.'

We seem to see the slumbering labourer, fallen asleep in the very midst of his toil, the hand scarce parted from the sickle, while the golden corn stands waiting to be reaped.

Then as a gleaner going home at eve, bearing the results of the day's gathering in a sheaf upon the head, as she chooses her steps over the stones of the brook, preserving her balance with care as she goes—

'Sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook.'

Lastly as a cyder-maker, an unhackneyed and perfectly characteristic personification. Though less familiar than the previous pictures, this one is presented with such fidelity as to carry conviction of its truth to the imagination even of one who has never witnessed the operation described—

'Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozing hours by hours.'

Here, as has been said, the long syllables of the last line express the long watch for the cyder-juice.

*Stanza III.* The width of Keats's sympathy with nature is well illustrated in the third stanza of this Ode. For him the beauty of nature meant more than that of herbage and vegetation. Here we have described the beauty of sound. For the ear is an inlet of beauty as well as the eye. The music of nature is a new and

untrodden subject, and one very fit to be handled by a poet. There is natural music as well as the music of numbers. As in the last stanza it is asked 'Who hath not seen thee?' so now we might say, 'Who hath not heard thy music?' The rustling trees, the purling brook, the whistling winds, the wing of the bee, the dashing of the waves, the song of the birds, the cries of animals,—these are nature's instruments. They sound in exquisite harmony to the ear that has learned their music.

Autumn has songs as well as Spring. They are here introduced in a scene of sunset glory. The beauty of the heavens is first described, a point too often forgotten while we gaze upon the loveliness of earth.

'While barred clouds'—that is, stratus or cirrho-stratus clouds drawn out in long lines—'bloom the soft dying day.' The beauty of the sky, that escapes many, did not escape Keats. But the sunset illuminates the earth as well as the sky:

• 'And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue.'

The most noticeable colour of the sunset is red, the broad red band of the spectrum, as in the Alpenglüh, so much admired when falling upon the white peaks of snow mountains. So the rich golden rose of the sunset light falling slanting upon the countryside corresponds to the glowing heavens above.

The scene given, the music follows. First, the 'mourning' buzz of the swarm of gnats; a high minor note, varying with the force of the breeze, as the insects themselves rise or fall on the air.

• The 'sallows' are a species of willows.

Next, the familiar bleating of the lambs, now, in Autumn, 'full-grown,' and because full-grown, loud bleating.

Then, the chirping song of the hedge-cricket, or grasshopper, that 'runs from hedge to hedge.'

Then, the whistling treble of the redbreast, the denizen of the orchard.

And last, the twittering of the swallows as they rally for their winter migration; and try the strength of their wings for their long flight.

Additional interest is lent to this catalogue of sweet sounds by the locality to which each one is attributed. The gnat mourns,

by the river; the lambs bleat from the hill; the grasshopper sings in the lane; the robin whistles in the garden; and the swallows twitter in the sky.

We may here quote, in illustration of the hedge-cricket's song, Keats's Sonnet, 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket,' dated Dec. 30, 1816.

'The poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,  
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run  
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;  
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead

In summer luxury,—he has never done  
With his delights; for when tired out with fun  
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never:

On a lone winter evening, when the frost  
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills  
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,  
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,  
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.'

## V. ODE ON MELANCHOLY

THIS Ode appeared in the volume of 1820. Mr. Palgrave has upon it this short note: ' *Melancholy*: Earlier, perhaps, than the preceding ode (Autumn, Sept. 1819). It has (to me) more of youthful mannerism. But this may be due to the somewhat morbid and over-subtle nature of the subject here handled by Keats, which a little outran his psychological powers. His letters furnish several analogous speculative passages, full of interest and of promise, even in the tentativeness and immaturity which the writer avows.' Keats makes no reference to this Ode, however, in his letters.

There is a certain similarity between the *Ode on Melancholy* and that *To a Nightingale*. In both there is sadness, but far more in the latter. The former analyzes the spirit of Melancholy; the latter breathes it. In both we find joy and pain alternately struggling for expression. In both the *motif* is subjective, a mood or state of the poet's mind; not, as in the *Autumn*, arising from nature, nor, as in the *Grecian Urn*, from art.

The following quotation from Mrs. Owen has a depth and conciseness that are excellent: "The "Ode on Melancholy" seems to have been greatly influenced by the verses at the commencement of Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy," which



suggest that fulfilled joy is melancholy, and that the other side of every pleasure is pain. But the thought of Keats goes beyond this; he sees the sadness of all joy, and that it is not the acknowledged grief of our lives which is the secret of true melancholy, but that our gladness should be what it is. It is not the wolf's-bane, the nightshade, the yew-berries, the death-moth, that are the saddest emblems; it is the "morning-rose," "the rainbow of the salt sand-wave," "the wealth of globed peonies," "the peerless eyes" of her that is loved. The most sorrowful reality of melancholy is that

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu!

Burton's lines are headed, 'The Author's Abstract of Melancholy, *Διαλογὸς*.' The following stanzas are characteristic:—

When I go musing all alone,  
Thinking of divers things fore-knownn,  
When I build castles in the ayr,  
Void of sorrow and void of feare,  
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet,  
Methinks the time runs very fleet.  
All my joyes to this are folly,  
Naught so sweet as melancholy.

When I lie waking all alone,  
Recounting what I have ill done,  
My thoughts on me then tyrannize,  
Feare and sorrow me surprise,  
Whether I tarry still or go,  
Methinks the time moves very slow.  
All my griefs to this are jolly,  
Naught so sad as melancholy.

Methinks I hear, methinks I see,  
 Sweet musick, wondrous melodie,  
 Towns, palaces, and cities fine;  
 Here now, then there; the world is mine.  
 Rare beauties, gallant Ladies shine,  
 Whate'er is lovely or divine.  
 All other joyes to this are folly,  
 None so sweet as melancholy.

Methinks I hear, methinks I see  
 Ghosts, goblins, fiends; my phantasie  
 Presents a thousand ugly shapes,  
 Headless bears, black men, and apes,  
 Doleful outcries, and fearful sights,  
 My sad and dismall soule affrights.  
 All my griefs to this are jolly,  
 None so damn'd as melancholy.

It was no doubt the same poem that inspired Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, 'with their delicious contrasts and dancing measures.' These in their turn influenced Keats, and it may assist to show us in what way this influence was felt if we transcribe some passages from them.

The opening lines of *L'Allegro* are as follows:—

Hence, loathed Melancholy,  
 Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born,  
 In Stygian cave forlorn  
 'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy!  
 Find out some uncouth cell,  
 Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,  
 And the night-raven sings;  
 There under ebon shades and low-brow'd rocks,  
 As ragged as thy locks,  
 In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.

These lines may be read beside the first, cancelled, stanza of the *Melancholy*, given below.

The following passages are from *Il Penseroso* :—

But hail, thou Goddess, sage and holy,  
Hail, divinest Melancholy!  
Whose saintly visage is too bright  
To hit the sense of human sight,  
And therefore to our weaker view  
O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue.

Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, stedfast, and demure,  
All in a robe of darkest grain,  
Flowing with majestick train,  
And sable stole of cyprus lawn,  
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.  
Come, but keep thy wonted state,  
With even step, and musing gait;  
And looks commercing with the skies,  
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.

There in close covert by some brook,  
Where no profaner eye may look,  
Hide me from day's garish eye,  
While the bee with honied thigh,  
That at her flowery work doth sing,  
And the waters murmuring,  
With such consort as they keep,  
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep.

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloysters pale,  
And love the high-embowed roof,  
With antick pillars massy proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light.

And may at last my weary age  
Find out the peaceful hermitage,  
The hairy gown and mossy cell,  
Where I may sit.

These pleasures, Melancholy, give,  
And I with thee will choose to live.

Keats himself had treated the same subject earlier, in his 'Roundelay' of the Indian Maiden in the fourth book of *Endymion*: and in *Isabella*, published together with the *Odes* in the volume of 1820, he inserts an apostrophe to Melancholy, with all sister influences, on the morbid broodings of the unfortunate maiden over the disinterred head of her murdered lover—

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!  
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!  
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,<sup>1</sup>  
Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us—O sigh!

For simple Isabel is soon to be  
Among the dead. (See stanzas lv. sqq.)

Lord Houghton, from the original manuscript, gives the deleted stanza, as follows; and it may serve to show the growth and development of the poetic idea:—

Though you should build an ark of dead men's bones,  
And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,  
Stitch shrouds together for a sail, with groans  
To fill it out, bloodstained and aghast;  
Although your rudder be a dragon's tail  
Long severed, yet still hard with agony,  
Your cordage large uprootings from the skull  
Of Bald Medusa, certes, you would fail  
To find the Melancholy—whether she  
Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull.

'But no sooner,' writes Lord Houghton, 'was this written than the poet became conscious that the contrast would destroy the general effect of luxurious tenderness which it

<sup>1</sup> This line and the next, taken with the cancelled first stanza, seem the seed-germ of the opening of this Ode.

was the object of the poem to produce, and he confined the gross notion of Melancholy to less violent images.' We must therefore carefully abstain from regarding these lines as any part of the poem, and may rather regard them as tentative. It was the purpose of Keats to exhibit his 'principle of Beauty' in this poem by means of contrast. It teaches the beauty that belongs to melancholy and the melancholy that belongs to beauty. There is nothing new in the thought that none can know true joy who know nothing of sadness. It remained for Keats to give a new turn to the thought by saying that none can know true sadness who do not know joy. Beauty, joy, pleasure, delight—these are the sympathetic conceptions that he calls up for us; and when we are sated with their appreciation, lo, then we are aware of a veiled figure standing behind them; and this is Melancholy. The loveliest flowers of the garden, the prismatic glory of the rainbow, the liquid eyes of the beloved, are the school in which we must learn the true nature of the melancholy mood. The capacity for joy and sorrow is one and the same. The same finely-strung nature that can enter most deeply into that which brings pleasure, is that also which is best fitted to feel the pang of suffering; the clod feels neither. •

The short life of Beauty, which reminds us of the lines in the *Nightingale*,

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow;

the fleeting of joy; the pain of gratified desire; these are the saddest of all things, and such is the lesson of our Ode.

We must not omit to note the suggestion, subtle but not obscure, of the luxury of melancholy. It is not difficult to see that the poet regarded both joy and melancholy as the sources of a refined, self-conscious enjoyment. For him it is a privilege to know them both; they are the two sides of the

case, the sweet and acid mingled in the cup. We shall all remember the melancholy Jaques in Shakspeare's *As You Like It*; a character which seems to pourtray this luxury. The same feeling, carried to an absurd extent, appears in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Queen of Corinth*, Act iv. Sc. 1, where Onos says,

Come, let's be melancholy.

In Dyce's edition of the works of these authors, vol. v. p. 460, there is the following note to the above quotation: 'This was considered a mark of gentility by the gallants of former times, and appears to have been an affectation borrowed from the French: most readers will recollect what Arthur says in Shakspeare's *King John*—

Methinks no body should be sad but I:  
Yet, I remember, when I was in France,  
Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,  
Only for wantonness.—Act iv. Sc. 1.'

A quotation from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, appended to *Lamia*, reminds us that Keats was familiar with that extraordinary work. And we can hardly doubt that he had read the beautiful song on Melancholy in Beaumont and Fletcher's play, *Nice Valer*, which is as follows:—

Hence all you vain delights,  
As short as are the nights  
' Wherein you spend your folly!  
There's not in this life sweet,  
If wise men were to see't,  
But only melancholy.  
O sweetest melancholy!

Welcome, folded arms, and fixed eyes;  
A sigh that piercing mortifies;  
A look that's fastened to the ground;  
A tongue chained up without a sound;

Mountain-heads, and pathless groves,  
 Places which pale passion loves;  
 Moonlight walks, when all the fowls  
 Are warmly housed, save bats and owls;  
 A midnight bell, a parting groan,  
 These are the sounds we feed upon:  
 Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley;  
 Nothing's so dainty-sweet as lovely melancholy.

In Collins's ode, *The Passions*, Melancholy is thus personified:—

With eyes upraised, as one inspired,  
 Pale Melancholy sat retired;  
 And from her wild sequester'd seat,  
 In notes by distance made more sweet,  
 Pour'd through the mellow horn her pensive soul.

Coleridge, in 1794, had published in the *Morning Chronicle* a fragment entitled *Melancholy*, evidently inspired by Dürer, in which he too personified the mood as a female figure, slumbering uneasily upon the ferns and ivy of a ruined abbey wall and vexed with strange dreams of things to come.

The same subject had also a fascination for Hood, whose *Ode to Melancholy* remains as the result.

We do not know whether Keats had seen Albrecht Dürer's engraving, *Melencolia*, but there is no reason why he should not have done so<sup>1</sup>.

There are certainly points of contact between this engraving and the cancelled stanza of this Ode; e.g. the dragon's tail—there being a dragon bearing a title-scroll in the picture—the reference to navigation, and the dreaming female genius.

<sup>1</sup> Its strange weird symbolism is discussed in *The Portfolio* (1894). See also *Encyc. Brit.* ed. ix. vol. vii, art. Dürer.

*ODE ON MELANCHOLY.*

## I.

No, no, go not to Lethę, neither twist  
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine ;  
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd  
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine ;  
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,  
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be  
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl  
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries ;  
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,  
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

## II.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall  
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,  
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,  
And hides the green hill in an April shroud ;  
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose  
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,  
Or on the wealth of globed peonies ;  
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,  
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,  
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

## III.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die ;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu ; and aching Pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips :



Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,  
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue  
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine ;  
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,  
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

About the technique of this Ode there is but little to say. The stanzas, consisting of a quatrain and a sextain, are alike in form, in regard both to the lines and the rhymes, with the exception of a slight alteration in the order of the rhymes in the sextain of the third stanza. The first two follow the formula :—

a b a b c d e c d e

The third is thus :—

a b a b c d e d c e

The rhymes themselves are excellently managed. The rhyming of 'owl' with 'soul,' is not exact, but is permissible.

The instances of alliteration and sound-repetition are as follows :—

St. i. 1, 2    No, no, go not . . neither . . bane . . . poisonous  
                     wine

4 *Nightshade . . . Proserpine*

5 Ro-sary . . . yew-berries

6 Beetle . . . be

9, 10 *Drowsily . . . drows* 1

St. ii. 1, 2, 3 *Fit . . . fall . . . from . . . fosters . . . flowers*

St. iii. *P*leasure . . . poison . . . sips

"Sovran . . . shrine . . . seen . . . save . . . whose . . .  
 strenuous . . . burst . . . Joy's . . . against . . . soul  
 shall taste . . . sadness

a-mong . . . hung

### Cloudy trophies.

## ANALYSIS.

*Stanza I.* The abruptness with which the Ode begins is explained by the fact that the original first stanza, which was deleted, suggested the possibility of finding the melancholy in some 'isle of Lethe dull.' Still, as said above, we must treat that stanza as non-existent in criticizing the poem, and hence the abruptness remains.

'Go not to Lethe,' that is, forgetfulness. Lethe, an African river, running underground, and afterwards reappearing, gave rise to the myth that souls in Hades were compelled to drink of a river of that name, a draught of which caused total oblivion of the past. It is a favourite conception with Keats, and we may compare these lines with the opening of the *Nightingale*.

'Neither twist Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine.' Wolf's-bane, or monk's-hood, is a plant of the genus *aconitum*; its parts are all poisonous, especially the root, and contain a narcotic alkaloid. It acts upon the brain and nervous system and produces a sort of frenzy. The twisting spoken of will be to extract the juice for use as a narcotic. Or perhaps it may be to tear up the plant tightly rooted in the earth.

'Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd  
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine.'

Is this the Deadly Nightshade (*bella-donna*) or the Enchanter's Nightshade, suggesting spells and sorcery? And what does nightshade 'kiss the forehead' for? Perhaps the following from Dr. Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* may supply an answer: 'Nightshade is called deadly, not so much because it is poisonous as because it was used to blacken the eyes in mourning. It was the plant of mourning for the dead.' But doubtless it refers to a chaplet of nightshade, worn to induce sleep.

'Ruby grape' must be equivalent to 'red berry.' 'Yew-berries,' because the yew commonly grows in churchyards. This line seems to mean 'do not betake yourself to melancholy prayers.' 'Psyche' is the name for butterfly, and is introduced in connexion with the moth; but 'the mournful Psyche' carries the mind to the story of the legendary Psyche persecuted by Venus, a truly

sorrowful conception. All these objects, wolf's-bane, nightshade, yewberries, beetle, death-moth, owl, are emblems of sombre depression. The poet adds

- 'For shade to shade will come too drowsily  
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.'

The meaning is that, if we would ~~fighly~~ understand Melancholy, we must know it by contrast and not by seeking out all the most depressing symbols and circumstances. 'Drowsily' seems to indicate that, where there is no contrast, the feeling of melancholy will be benumbed. It is the old principle that things are best known by their opposites.

*Stanza II.* This contrast, a true background for Melancholy and the foil by which she may be known, must be sought in some beautiful and attractive object. A rose, a rainbow, p~~ro~~ncies, the lady fair, may serve the turn. The comparison of the onset of melancholy to a shower of rain is beautiful. An 'April shroud' is apt, as conveying the power of concealment of landscape possessed by the spring rain-shower. The connexion between the rainbow and the 'salt sand-wave' is not so obvious. The latter six lines of this stanza suggest the modern aesthetic affectation, and there is a touch of the ludicrous in the striking picture of the angry mistress and the lover holding her hand and indulging his melancholy while she scolds.

But Keats evidently did not see this aspect of it, or he would hardly have inserted this image in an ode so terribly earnest. He had, it would seem, small sense of humour. Humour, however, is a gift dangerous, and sometimes fatal, to poetry. Great masters may employ it safely. Shakspeare and Chaucer are none the less poetic because of their rich vein of it. But in Hood it offends against taste, and poisons poetry. Wordsworth however would have been 'saved from certain puerilities had he possessed it; and Coleridge often displays his deficiency of humour, as in his 'Lines to a Young Ass.' Perhaps Keats would not have written as he sometimes did to Fanny Brawne, had this faculty been more developed in him.

*Stanza III.* This is the most perfect stanza, the pearl, of the Ode. Here the contrast, so insisted on in the former stanzas, is

exhibited in a series of impersonations. Melancholy is now a goddess and her companions are other deified abstractions, but always such as reveal her by contrast, being no other than Beauty, Joy, Pleasure, and Delight. With what exquisite touches does our poet display 'lovely Melancholy,' and yet how terrible the pathos is!

1. 'Beauty—that must die.' The intensity is greater than that of the third stanza of the *Nightingale*, where, as we have seen, Keats was probably thinking of his sister.

2. 'And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips Bidding adieu.' The pitiful thing is that no joy will stay: all flits away. The very attitude of joy is not that of welcome but of farewell.

3. 'And aching Pleasure nigh.' Satiety and disappointment attend indulgence. It is not honey, but sweet poison, that the bee sucks there.

4. 'In the very temple of Delight' there is a shrine to the veiled goddess Melancholy, which is called 'sovrän' because melancholy dominates delight.

But only he who knows Joy can taste the quality of Melancholy. It is a hackneyed truth that the experience of sorrow qualifies for joy. It is a novel and interesting statement of truth that the experience of joy qualifies for melancholy. Keats means that a sensitive and high-strung soul will be open to both. His mode of expressing it is bold:

'Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue  
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine.'

It might have imperilled the Ode to compare joy in such a serious connexion with such a sensuous luxury as taste; but it is so well managed that there is no loss of tone, and the effect is heightened rather than lowered.

'His soul shall taste the sadness of her might'—  
equivalent to the power of her sadness;

'And be among her cloudy trophies hung.'

With this passage we may compare the lines 'In a drear-nighted December'

'Were there ever any  
 Writhed not at passed joy?  
 To know the change and feel it  
 When there is none to heal it,  
 Nor numbed sense to steal it,  
 Was never said in rhyme.'

The following quotations from two critics of Keats may close this account of the Ode's 'strange note of weird sadness.'

First, Professor Dowden, in *Transcripts and Studies*: 'Amid all the varied imagery of Keats' *Ode on Melancholy*, the idea of the poem stands forth. The melancholy of melancholics, Keats would say to us, is that of joy which must pass away, and of beauty which must fade and die. "She dwells with Beauty." And here we are fortunate in being able to watch the idea in its origin, and assist, as it were, at the very act of creation; for we know the earlier opening of the Ode, rejected by Keats because the raw-head and bloody bones conception embodied in those rejected lines was felt to be out of harmony with the general effect of luxurious tenderness.'

Next, Mr. Bridges: 'The perception in this Ode is profound, and no doubt experienced. The paradox that melancholy is most deeply felt by the organization most capable of joy is clinched at the end by the observation of the reaction which satiety provokes in such temperaments, so that it is also in the moment of extremest joy that it suddenly fades. . . . In spite of the great beauty of this Ode, especially of the last stanza, it does not hit so hard as one would expect. I do not know whether this is due to a false note<sup>1</sup> towards the end of the second stanza, or to a disagreement between the second and third stanzas. In the second stanza the melancholy is, as Lord Houghton said, a "luxurious tenderness," while in the third it is strong, painful, and incurable. The line—"That fosters the droop-headed flowers all," means all the flowers only that are sacred to sorrow. See End. iv. 170.'

<sup>1</sup> In his treatment of the lady's anger merely as a beautiful phenomenon.

## VI. ODE TO MAIA. (FRAGMENT.)

*'Written on May-Day.'*

- May 1, 1818. *Unfinished. Posthumous.*

KEATS himself has recorded the date of this brief composition. He was at Teignmouth, in South Devon, and wrote thus to his friend Reynolds, under date May 3, 1818: 'With respect to the affections and poetry you must know by sympathy my thoughts that way, and I dare say these few lines will be but a ratification. I wrote them on May-day, and intend to finish the Ode all in good time.' From these words and from the invocation in the first line we draw sufficient authority for the twofold title *Fragment of an Ode to Maia. Written on May-Day.*

Lord Houghton says, 'It is much to be regretted he did not finish this Ode; this commencement is in his best manner: the sentiment and expression perfect, as every traveller in modern Greece will recognize.'

The Ode was first published in 1848 with the *Life, Letters, &c.*

### WRITTEN ON MAY-DAY.

MOTHER of Hermes! and still youthful Maia!  
May I sing to thee  
As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baiae?  
Or may I woo thee

In earlier Sicilian? or thy smiles  
 Seek as they once were sought, in Grecian isles,  
 By bards who died content on pleasant sward,  
 Leaving great verse unto a little clan?  
 O, give me their old vigour, and unheard  
 Save of the quiet Primrose, and the span  
     Of heaven and few ears,  
 Rounded by thee, my song should die away  
     Content as theirs,  
 Rich in the simple worship of a day.

Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, so frequently consulted by Keats, speaks thus: 'Maia, a daughter of Atlas and Pleione. She was the mother of Mercury by Jupiter. She was one of the Pleiades, the most luminous of the seven sisters. Vid. Pleiades. *Apollod.* 3. c. 10, *Virg. Aen.* i. v. 301.'

It will be observed that this is a new experiment in metre; and it is entirely successful. The stanza consists of fourteen lines:

Lines 1 and 3 are the five-foot iambic, but with feminine ending.

Lines 2 and 4 are two-foot iambic, also with feminine ending.

Lines 5 to 10 the normal five-foot iambic, the first two a rhyming couplet, the next four a quatrain in alternate rhymes.

Lines 11 to 14 a quatrain, the rhymes alternate and the lines of varying length, the first a three-foot, the third a two-foot, and the second and fourth five-foot lines.

The rhymes are irregular, but not displeasing:

'Maia' is rhymed with 'Baiae'

'Sward' with 'unheard'

'Ears' with 'theirs.'

The opening reminds us of the *Ode to Psyche*. The motif is classic, and especially Greek. The feeling expressed in this solitary stanza is that of an eager desire to attain the ideal in

poetry, its strength and sweetness, as Keats recognized that it had been attained by poets of the ancient days, Roman, Sicilian, or Greek, who wrote, or may be supposed to have written, in praise of Maia. Baiae was a beautiful place, near the sea, on the shore of Campania.

Even as these old poets 'died content,' 'leaving great verse unto a little clan,' so would he, could he but feel the same vigorous stirrings of intellectual and poetic life, equally be content to leave his song to the few who, in an unappreciative age, could appreciate it; 'rich in the simple worship of a day.'

In this fragment the Greek and Nature elements are both present. The whole effect of the stanza is very lovely, truly classical, idyllic, and in his best style. Such a description of the poets of Hellas, inimitable as well in its brevity as in its satisfying loveliness, probably does not exist in any language. We know that Keats intended to say more, but what he has said does not leave a sense of incompleteness.



## VII. ODE ON INDOLENCE

IN the letter which Keats began on February 14, 1819, and in that passage of it which he dated March 19 he wrote the following description of a mood which visited him and which is undoubtedly the basis of the imaginative work of this Ode :

This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless ; I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* ; my passions are all asleep, from my having slumbered till nearly eleven, and weakened the animal fibre all over me, to a delightful sensation, about three degrees on this side of faintness. If I had teeth of pearl, and the breath of lillies, I should call it languor ; but, as I am, I must call it laziness. In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed, in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of excitement, and pain no unbearable frown : neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love, have any alertness of countenance ; as they pass by me they seem rather like three figures on a Greek vase, two men and a woman, whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise. This is the only happiness, and it is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the mind.

This Ode combines in itself the element of personal feeling, such as we recognize in the *Melancholy* and the *Night-*

*ingale*, and the old Greek life of *Psyche* and the *Grecian Urn*; though, as Mr. Colvin points out, in neither case so powerfully as in those. 'In it,' he adds, 'Keats again calls up the image of a marble urn, but not for its own sake, only to illustrate the guise in which he feigns the allegoric presences of Love, Ambition, and Poetry to have appeared to him in a day-dream. This Ode, less highly wrought and more unequal than the rest, contains the imaginative record of a passing mood . . . when the wonted intensity of his emotional life was suspended under the spell of an agreeable physical languor. Well had it been for him had such moods come more frequently to give him rest.' To this may be added the comment of Mrs. Owen: 'In the *Ode on Indolence*, the passing and re-passing of the shadowy figures of Love, Ambition, and Poetry, and the weariness with which the poet looks at them and turns from them, brings to us the same feeling as the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the failure of vitality.' Again: 'It is a depth of suffering loneliness that no human comfort could reach or touch which speaks to us from the words,

Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,  
And for the day faint visions there is store.'

The three personifications, Love, Ambition, and Poetry, represent the three influences, fascinating yet painful, by which his mind was haunted and from whose over-stimulating and wearing powers he would fain obtain some relief.

He gives them here in the opposite order from that in which they had entered his real life. Love, which he puts first, had become his only during the course of the winter then expiring, and his engagement could hardly be more at this time (March 19) than five or six weeks old. Ambition may date from the publication of *Endymion*, and its check from the attacks of the reviewers in August and September,

1818. While Poetry had been his *δαίμων*, the presiding and uncompromising genius of his life, ever since the early days at Enfield.

We find him dealing with these allegorical personifications elsewhere. Thus :

then on the shore

Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

Fame, like a wayward girl, will still be coy  
To those who woo her with too slavish knees.

And especially

Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,  
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

'The Ode was first given by Lord Houghton among the *Literary Remains* in 1848, with the date 1819.' 'The date under which [the above-quoted] passage occurs in the Journal letter is March 19. It seems almost certain therefore that the Ode must have been composed after the fragment of *The Eve of St. Mark*—not before it, as usually given.' (Forman.)

Illustrations of the thought in this Ode may be found in two of the other poems of Keats. In *Lamia* he makes his serpent-woman

of sciential brain

To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain ;  
Define their pettish limits, and estrange  
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange.

This indicates how closely linked together Keats felt human happiness and human woe to be. The antidote he most highly prized, 'the blissful cloud of summer-indolence,' which, he says, 'benumb'd my eyes,' is found in the song 'In a drear-nighted December,' where he says—

To know the change and feel it  
 When there is none to heal it,  
 Nor, numbed sense to steal it,  
 Was never said in rhyme.

The *Ode on Indolence* appears among the posthumous poems. It would appear not to have received the final touches from the author's hand. We may take it as supplementary to *Melancholy*, 'happy insensibility' being the remedy Keats recognized for sorrow.

### ODE ON INDOLENCE.

*' They toil not, neither do they spin'*

ONE morn before me were three figures seen,  
 With bowed necks, and joined hands, side-faced;  
 And one behind the other stepp'd serene,  
 In placid sandals, and in white robes graced;  
 They pass'd, like figures on a marble urn,  
 When shifted round to see the other side;  
 They came again; as when the urn once more  
 Is shifted round, the first seen shades return;  
 And they were strange to me, as may betide  
 With vases, to one deep in Phidian lore.

#### II.

How is it, Shadows! that I knew ye not?  
 How came ye muffled in so hush a mask?  
 Was it a silent deep-disguised plot  
 To steal away, and leave without a task

My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;  
 The blissful cloud of summer-indolence  
 Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less:  
 Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower:  
 O, why did ye not melt and leave my sense  
 Unhaunted quite of all but—nothingness?

## III.

A third time pass'd they by, and passing, turn'd  
 Each one the face a moment whiles to me:  
 Then faded, and to follow them I burn'd  
 And ached for wings, because I knew the three;  
 The first was a fair Maid, and Love her name;  
 The second was Ambition, pale of cheek,  
 And ever watchful with fatigued eye;  
 The last, whom I love more, the more of blame  
 Is heap'd upon her, maiden most unmeek,—  
 I knew to be my demon Poesy.

## IV.

They faded, and, forsooth! I wanted wings:  
 O, folly! What is Love? and where is it?  
 And for that poor Ambition! it springs  
 From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;  
 For Poesy!—no,—she has not a joy,—  
 At least for me,—so sweet as drowsy noons,  
 And evenings steep'd in honey'd indolence;  
 O for an age so shelter'd from annoy,  
 That I may never know how change the moons,  
 Or hear the voice of busy common-sense!

## v.

And once more<sup>7</sup> came they by; alas! wherefore?  
 My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams;  
 My soul had been a lawn besprinkled o'er  
 With flowers, and stirring shades, and baffled beams:  
 The morn was clouded, but no shower fell,  
 Tho' in her lids hung the sweet tears of May;  
 The open casement press'd a new-leaved vine,  
 Let in the budding warmth and throstle's lay;  
 O Shadows! 'twas a time to bid farewell!  
 Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine.

## ;

## vi.

So, ye<sup>•</sup> three Ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot raise  
 My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass;  
 For I would not be dieted with praise,  
 A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!  
 Fade softly from my eyes, and be once more  
 In masque-like figures on the dreamy urn;  
 Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,  
 And for the day faint visions there is store;  
 Vanish, ye Phantoms! from my idle spright,  
 Into the clouds, and never more return!

---

The structure of these six stanzas is similar to that of the *Grecian Urn* and *Melancholy*, the quatrain and sextain, ten lines, each of ten syllables, without short lines or Alexandrines. The order of the

rhymes is the same in the first four stanzas, but is varied in stanzas v and vi, as may be seen by the following formula :

Stanzas i, ii, iii, iv.	Stanza v.	Stanza vi.
a	a	a'
b	b	b
a	a	a'
b	b	b
c	c	c
d	d	d
e	e	e
c	d	c
d	c	e
e	e	d

All the rhymes are sound, except in stanza vi, where 'grass' is mated with 'farce.' Keats would scarcely have allowed this poem, published among his posthumous verses, to have gone forth with this blemish. There is one feminine ending, in stanza i, 'facéd' and 'gracéd'; which it will be noted are not to be read as monosyllables, for, as we have seen, wherever Keats gives the final -ed, he intends it to be pronounced separately, whereas, when he does not intend it to be pronounced, he uses the syncopated form, as 'burn'd,' 'embroider'd.'

The Ode has but little alliteration.

In Stanza i. : Stepped serene . . . sandals . . . graced.

Shifted . . . see . . . side.

Shifted . . . seen shades . . . strange.

In Stanza ii. : Muffled . . . mask.

deep-disguised.

Pulse . . . pain . . . pleasure.

In Stanza iii. : Passéd . . . passing.

Faded . . . follow.

In Stanza iv. : Facéd . . . sooth.

Wanted . . . wings . . . what . . . where.

From . . . fever . . . fit.

In Stanza v. : Stirring . . . shades.

Baffled . . . beams.

## ANALYSIS.

*Stanza I.* The three allegorical figures are at once introduced—not ‘two men and a woman,’ as he says in the letter, but three women—moving solemnly forward, with heads bent and hands clasped, in single file, and, as they move, passing out of sight, as figures do upon an urn that is turned round; but reappearing as the urn completes its revolution. The poet however does not recognize the figures: they are strange to him as an unknown classical character sculptured upon some vase of Phidias.

*Stanza II.* The poet knew them not; he had seen but their side faces. Why did they so disguise themselves? Perchance to leave him indolent, that happy, vacant, narcotic state that reminds us of the condition depicted in the opening stanza of the *Nightingale*. Alas, he says, that they did not still leave him so!

*Stanza III.* They come again; and this time turn their faces to the poet, who recognizes them and fain would fly to them as they fade from his vision; fair Love, pale Ambition, and fierce Poesy, ‘maiden most unmeek,’ who does not yield to the animadversions of the critics, and whom the poet loves the better for them.

*Stanza IV.* Yes, they are gone, and O might he go with them, borne on wings through air! Yet no; for as to Love, no one knows what it is, nor where. Ambition too, it comes but from a brief disorder of man’s heart. Poesy then! she has joys; but ah! none so great as indolence, that dreamy sweet relief from passion, that refuge from the seasons’ changes, that silence from the saws and fussy wisdom of the world.

*Stanza V.* Once more they come, but too late to move him from the soft beauties of his slumber, the soothing soporific influences of the garden and the Spring. They cannot stir him now: he sheds no tears for them.

*Stanza VI.* Nay, let them go and leave him undisturbed. He prefers indolence to praise bestowed on him insincerely or undeserved. He will not be the darling of the reviewers. If he wins praise at all, it shall be for worth. At present, he will neither



love, nor seek to rise, nor write. Let these attractions recede and become as dreams of art. He knows that in the night his thoughts will come to look at him and bring him despair. Ay, and even by day will they come, though with lessened force. So let these ghosts away and come no more.

It is repose for which Keats here so passionately craves; but it is the repose of despair. In the sonnet 'Why did I laugh to-night?' he strikes a still deeper note of hopelessness, when he says, 'Death is life's high meed.' And it was death that brought him repose at last.

Mr. Bridges suggests that the details of the poem are too arbitrary, since it is hard, for instance, to fix any meaning to the fourfold appearance of the figures on the urn. He adds: 'Parts of stanzas 2 and 3 and all the 5th are of the best work; but the whole Ode scarcely earns its title; and its main interest—that is, its fervour and feeling, betrays the poet into an undignified utterance in line 4 of the last verse.'

# THE ODE IN ENGLISH POETRY BEFORE KEATS

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THE Ode is the normal form of lyrical poetry. It is the expression of the thought and feeling of the poet, not the narration of events or the description of nature. It arose in Greece in the songs of Alcaeus and Sappho, Anacreon and Alcman, Simonides and Pindar. The last of these names is the one chiefly connected with the Greek regular Ode, with its strophes, antistrophes, and epodes. The name ὕμνος, derived from αἰδέειν, to sing, reminds us that it was originally set to music to be chanted by a chorus and accompanied by an appropriate dance.

In the literary Odes of Horace we see the form in which the Greek Ode passed into Roman literature.

The Ode made its appearance in English literature in the poems of Spenser. We may say, roughly, that it has had three periods.

The *First Period* of the English Ode is that of Spenser (1552-1598), and Milton (1608-1674). In the *Epithalamium*, a poem written by Spenser on his marriage, the Ode had a splendid introduction into our language. Only second to this is his *Prothalamion* on the marriage of the Ladies

Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, daughters of Lord Worcester. These great odes belong to the great Elizabethan period. A noble, tender, and elevated spirit pervades them, and informs their diction. Milton's *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, written in 1629, is our next great ode. It was composed when he was only twenty-one. His splendid poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, are not strictly odes, as they are descriptive. Within this period fall Herrick (1591-1633), and Cowley (1618-1667), who have left fine work, though Cowley's odes are wrongly styled 'Pindarique,' as they have not the regularity of structure which Pindar deemed essential.

The *Second Period* brings us the Ode of Dryden (1631-1700), Gray (1716-1771), and Collins (1720-1759). In common with other poetic forms, the Ode, after Milton, partook of the new style. Dryden's two odes, *Alexander's Feast* and *For St. Cecilia's Day*, notwithstanding their air of artificiality, have much force and stateliness, and the onomatopoeia of the latter is striking. A few years later, Pope (1688-1744) followed and imitated Dryden, with no great success. The odes of Thomson (1700-1748) and Shenstone (1714-1763) need only be mentioned. Gray's *Bard* and *Progress of Poetry*, wrongly styled Pindaric; his *Ode on the Spring*, and that *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, and his *Hymn to Adversity*, are compositions of a high order. Dryden's and Gray's odes were written to be set to music, like those of the Greeks. Collins wrote many odes, of which that *To Evening* is the most purely poetical. His *Ode on the Passions*, also written for music, carries to the full the contemporary habit of personification. Cowper (1731-1800), and Burns (1759-1796), also wrote odes, but of no characteristic distinctiveness. None of the odes of this period can be ranked with those of Spenser and Milton.

In the *Third Period* we arrive at the Ode of Wordsworth

(1775-1850), Coleridge (1792-1834), Campbell (1777-1844), and Shelley (1792-1822). All these were contemporaries of Keats. They were all born before him, and all outlived him.

The Nature motive given by Thomson and Cowper was splendidly developed by these great poets. Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, however irregular in structure, is one of the noblest we possess. His *Ode to Duty* is regular in form, and breathes the very spirit of reverent devotion. Of Coleridge's irregular odes, the *Ode to the Departing Year*, and *To France* are lofty in tone. Campbell's *Ode to Winter*, written in Germany in 1800, though on a natural subject, is composed in the old rhetorical and personifying style of Gray and Collins. Shelley composed a number of ethereal odes, of which his *Skylark* and *To the West Wind* are the most fervid and poetical. We may name Lord Byron (1788-1824), who wrote *The Isles of Greece*, and Hood, who, like Keats, wrote odes *To Autumn* and *To Melancholy*.

These poets, contemporaries of Keats, were products of the same forces which produced him.

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